

Night and Fog

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Night and Fog

The Collected
Dramas and Screenplays
of **Danilo Kiš**

Translated and with an introduction by
John K. Cox



NIGHT AND FOG

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*Night and Fog, The Parrot, A Wooden Trunk for Thomas Wolfe,
The Mechanical Lions, Electra, Marin Držić Always Lands on His Feet and
Končarevci (A Factory Story)* by Danilo Kiš © Librarie Arthème Fayard and
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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE



It is an honor to find myself once more in the role of translator of some of the works of Danilo Kiš (1935–1989). Only one of these plays has been published before in English, and that was *Night and Fog*, in *Absinthe: New European Writing* 12. I am very grateful to the founder and chief editor of Helena History Press, Katalin Kádár Lynn, for hearing me out about this project and for her willingness to take it on.

As the reputation of Danilo Kiš continues to grow with the approach of the twenty-fifth anniversary of his passing, it is important for us to keep as much of his work in mind as possible as we analyze his ideas, his artistic innovations, and his place in literary and intellectual history. The reductionistic tendency to boil down a writer's essential *oeuvre* to a few well-thumbed and oft-cited works—especially when those works are as powerful and as magnificently translated as Kiš's earlier novels and story cycles are—can be hard to resist. But there is a lot more great writing by Kiš out there, as I hope these seven dramas and screenplays attest. And, happily, there is even more to come.

*

The source texts for the translations in this collection can be found in the following table:

- (1968) *Night and Fog*: In *Night and Fog* (Zagreb: Globus, 1983), pp. 15–52.
- (1968) *Electra*: In *Pesme, Elektra*, ed. by Mirjana Miočinović (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1995), pp. 101–162.
- (1970) *The Parrot*: In *Night and Fog* (Zagreb: Globus, 1983), pp. 53–92.
- (1974) *A Wooden Trunk for Thomas Wolfe*: In *Night and Fog* (Zagreb: Globus, 1983), pp. 93–144.

- (1979) *Marin Držić Always Lands On His Feet!*: In *Dva filmska scenarija*, ed. by Mirjana Miočinović (Vršac: KOV, 2011), pp. 7–51.
- (1979) *A Factory Story*: In *Dva filmska scenarija*, ed. by Mirjana Miočinović (Vršac: KOV, 2011), pp. 53–145.
- (1980) *The Mechanical Lions*: In *Night and Fog* (Zagreb: Globus, 1983), pp. 147–227.

Their order of appearance in the volume at hand is not purely chronological. I have preserved the sequence of the four “main” plays from *Night and Fog*, an anthology which appeared in 1983 and which has been maintained by subsequent publishers as a separate volume in various editions of his collected works. These four plays are followed by *Electra* (actually the second play Kiš wrote), which was published after his death. At the end I placed the screenplays, both because they are made of different artistic material and because they were the last to appear in print in Yugoslavia (or in this case, Serbia), in 2011.

*

There are a few peculiarities of translation in any volume as big as this one. In terms of my approach to Kiš’s texts, I have attempted to bring, where appropriate, a historian’s sense of authenticity and concreteness in setting and context to scenes and conversations. At times I have favored synonyms over literalness, and occasionally clarity over severe devotion to form. Doubtless I have not done justice to certain lines and passages where meter matters and where dialect, if repurposed in an English mode that did not make it trivial or so universal as to render it insipid, could foreground some additional nuances of hierarchy and emotion. I have also used phonetic English versions of most proper names, again to avoid “denaturing” the texts and the regions and history they evoke. For these things I beg the reader’s indulgence and hope that the reading is still enjoyable enough to give us access to Kiš’s innovations and ideas.

Kiš’s writings, like his interviews, were not designed to mystify. There are, nevertheless, a few words that he uses that are hard to

translate. One set of these words is terms, typically adjectives and adverbs, that are used very frequently. They are especially frequent in these plays, where stage directions are an important part of the text. So, forms and shadings of *poverljiv* (confidential or intimate), *zamišljen* (reflective, thoughtful), and *zamašćen* (greasy, grubby), for instance, come up a great deal and can lull a translator into a false sense of security. The other kind of peculiarity stems from the inevitably imperfect fit of the Serbo-Croatian (as Kiš would have called it) and English lexicons.

For example, “the outskirts of town” means something very different, at least in North America, than what Kiš intends with *periferija grada* (a run-down industrial or working-class district, as opposed to the ritzier haunts of the city center); likewise, we cannot usually use “pathetic” for Kiš’s *patetičan* or *patetično*, which means “with pathos” or “emotional(ly)”.

The other peculiarity of these texts that deserves mention here is the presence of sentence fragments and repetition in the prose. This occurs, especially in the screenplays, because they are working documents that were designed to produce another, partly visual, work of art. When we approach them first, or primarily, as texts, they might seem a bit lumpy or dry, but it’s for a good cause.

*

I am fortunate to have many friends and acquaintances who love great literature and did not mind lending a few brain cells to this translation operation. My thanks, for their encouragement and expertise, to these kind souls: Barbara Allen, Katy Cox, Dwayne Hayes, Nina Jovanović, Milcho Manchevski, Timur Mustafayev, John Patterson, Leo Rafolt, Enrico Sassi, Larry Schwartz, Saša Štulhofer, Ajla Terzić, and Massimo Verzella. This time around I must acknowledge a particular debt of gratitude to two friends who went far above and beyond the call of duty in helping me interpret difficult passages. Dalmatian dialect items in the play about the sixteenth century would have humbled me forever were it not for the gracious and generous help of Dora Komnenović; and I never would have gotten the hang of all the slang in some of these

P R E F A C E

contemporary works without frequent consultations with the wise and ever-patient Dragan Miljković.

To Mirjana and Pascale, as ever, I am much obliged for the warm support and guidance.

This book is dedicated to the memories of Charles Jelavich (1922–2013) and Barbara Brightfield Jelavich (1923–1995), two remarkable, multi-faceted intellectuals who, more than anyone else, helped my love of a region grow into a love of history.

INTRODUCTION

THE DRAMA OF HISTORY ACCORDING TO KIŠ: ACROSS BOUNDARIES, ACROSS BORDERS



A TYPOLOGY OF THE PLAYS

These dramas—to use an umbrella term that seems to work reasonably well for items in this anthology, which evince in varying combinations characteristics of adaptations, dramatizations, treatments, screenplays, TV dramas, and stage plays—break naturally into two thematic groupings. *Marin Držić Always Lands on His Feet* (hereafter, *Marin Držić*) and *Electra* are homages to important literary productions and producers from periods well before the twentieth century; the other five pieces here all treat, in one way or another, the political conflicts of the last century, which were important to the entire world. The territory covered in these works, in terms of form and ideas, ranges from the familiar to the rare, so it is worth thinking about unifying characteristics the two sets of dramas both have, before we move on to some thoughts on each individual work.

In some of his essays (typically the ones not yet available in English translation), Kiš discusses the South Slavic, or fellow Yugoslav, writers whom he admired. Above all, he lists Ivo Andrić, Miroslav Krleža, and Miloš Crnjanski. When one considers *Marin Držić*, however, a fourth name must be added to that list. Historical studies and fictional treatments of Držić were not uncommon in the Yugoslavia of the 1960s and 1970s, because of the westerly orientation of Držić's work and, perhaps more importantly, because of his reputation for rebelliousness or even subversion towards the government of his day. In a similar vein, readers of Kiš's interviews and essays have long known how much he prizes the work of Rabelais, Borges, Joyce, Endre Ady, Bruno Schulz, and a number of modern French and Russian poets and short-story writers. The

canon of great world literature was an acceptable concept to Kiš as long as it was truly international and smaller “languages” were represented, rather than being just the reproduction of Western European and North American dominance in the literary and cultural fields. He proposed plenty of additions and deletions to standard literary canons, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he would have us add Euripides, and Antonin Artaud, to the list of generally admired writers. Just how much his prized and admired writers influenced Kiš is a matter for his biographers; but his citation and frequent evocation of their works and methods are enough to demonstrate to us that they are vital to understanding his world view.

We have, then, in the first and smaller set of dramas, some important clues to the continued relevance of older parts of the literary historical record. These two dramas also have a significant place in them for religion. It is not so much the individual aspects of belief that are worked into the texts as the institutional ones: Electra and her allies pray (in the ways that suit them) and Držić finds both employment and (tenuous) social status as a cleric. For both sets of characters, religion is malleable, almost venal, and far from monolithic in an organizational sense; there is nothing earth-shattering in Kiš’s portrayal of religion here, unless it causes us to raise an eyebrow over the dogged ideological commitments of Boris Davidovič Novski during his Rubashov-like decline and fall. But the author has again proven adept at providing that blend of background and setting that successfully sets these works of literature into a certain culture and discourse—a world of givens and assumptions necessary, in these cases, not so much to see the mechanisms of power or the mentality of mass movements at work, as to understand the characters’ emotions and choices. Finally there are also despotic governments, of the old-fashioned, non-ideological variety, in operation in both of these dramas.

This brings us now to the bigger grouping of five plays. This set consists of *The Parrot*, *The Mechanical Lions*, *Night and Fog*, *Končarevci*, and *A Wooden Trunk for Thomas Wolfe* (hereafter, *Thomas Wolfe*). They are all, in one form or another, twentieth-century testimonies on the themes of exclusion and violence that were so important to Kiš. Two of the plays deal with fascism or

INTRODUCTION

its legacy (*Night and Fog* and *Thomas Wolfe*), while three deal with communism (*The Parrot*, *The Mechanical Lions*, and *Končarevci*). All five of the works contain a mixture of portrayals of everyday life and artistic chronicles of political crimes and human rights abuses, ranging from anti-Semitism to the extra-legal excesses of Stalinist purges. Only one of the dramas, *Thomas Wolfe*, concerns the role of the artist in processing the emotional and moral damage of totalitarianism; this is likely one of the reasons that this play enjoys such a glowing reputation in the eyes of many Kiš critics.

Two other similarities among the plays in this group are the prevalence of death and the interrogative style of conversation or interaction among characters. Prominent characters die in three of the plays; in *The Parrot* and *The Mechanical Lions* these are violent deaths, but in *Thomas Wolfe* it is a “natural”, if desperate, passing. In the other two plays, the deaths are less emotionally prominent but still important to the plot: in *Končarevci* the Russian engineer’s self-destruction brings to light a major disconnect between ideology and lived socialism, and of course *Night and Fog* is haunted (autobiographically) by the wartime disappearance and murder of the young man’s father. The role of interrogation, both official and colloquial, is unique and conspicuous in all five of these works. In *Night and Fog*, *The Parrot*, and *Thomas Wolfe*, the characters pile questions and provocations upon each other almost unceasingly. In *Končarevci* and *The Mechanical Lions*, we are awash in more formal, literal interrogations. The kinds culminating in show trials and barrelhead justice prevail in *The Mechanical Lions*; *Končarevci* does indeed contain some of the same but has the added interplay of freer, if dogged, queries among colleagues or people at roughly the same level of the power structure, as well as the spontaneous, irreverent, and persistent inquiries of the film crew.

THE INDIVIDUAL PLAYS: SUMMARIES AND CONNECTIONS

Night and Fog is a study in nostalgia and memory and also a look at transnational aspects of both ethnicity and the communist movement in Eastern Europe. The narrator, a Yugoslav-Hungarian man

who is perhaps thirty years of age, returns to Hungary to visit the village where he spent the war years. He eventually finds two of his schoolteachers—a married couple—from those years, and a long and sometimes testy conversation ensues. It is strongly implied that the teachers were sympathizers of the fascist Arrow Cross movement, but now they are pious, card-carrying Communist Party functionaries.

The territory we visit through the flashbacks of the young traveler—Andreas, or Andi, Sam—will be familiar to the reader of Kiš's autobiographical stories in *Early Sorrows*; there are also other short stories that treat of similar places and people, and the portrait of the conveniently communist couple in another of the plays in this volume, *The Parrot*, is very much in the vein of the portrait of the Rigos here.¹

The Hungarian town that is the target of all this nostalgia is multi-ethnic, as were Kiš's real hometowns of Subotica (Hungarian: Szabadka) and Novi Sad (Hungarian: Újvidék). The railroad that bisects the Hungarian regions figuring in the play is the one that Kiš's father traveled regularly in his capacity as a Yugoslav railway inspector, and the action in the play conveniently (and entirely plausibly) leaps over the period of the Cominform crisis and subsequent tensions, that is, a war of words, mutual excommunications, blockades, between Tito's Yugoslavia, on the one hand, and the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies, including Hungary, on the other. The communist system was certainly not identical throughout the region, but people's lived experiences made everyday existence clearly intelligible across borders, and, especially after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Communist regimes of the region were indispensable to one another. (This accounts for the TV station's lack of enthusiasm for Kiš's original draft of the drama, which he mentions in the preceding document. Milovan Djilas, another writer and political dissident, found out even earlier and more harshly than Kiš about the limits of criticizing the USSR and Eastern Europe even in Tito's revisionist Yugoslavia on its "third path.")

¹ For more details on the production of this play, see also Kiš's interview "Life, Literature," in Susan Sontag, ed., *Homo Poeticus: Essays and Interviews* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), pp. 247–248.

The rich *realia* of life in wartime, especially in scenes connected with Andi's now-lost father, shine forth like rare stones in this dialogue-driven drama. We hear of Andi's father (an autobiographical parallel to Kiš's) delivering an impromptu sermon on the gastronomical virtues of wild eggplant and *gewürztraminer*; memory-fueled conversations among the three characters paint a picture in our minds of little Andi at school, holding his arms out to receive the bread his classmates had brought as charity for his unfortunate family, bread he would then tote home the way a person carries an armful of branches for firewood; and we witness a confrontation between Andi and Emil about the relationship between vegetables (sugar beets, cauliflower, and potatoes, specifically) and collaboration in Soviet POW camps.

Emil's pessimism in the second half of the play, about memories as a nihilistic mechanism capable of producing only "smoke, vapor, dream, [and] fog," is indeed self-serving. Andi, on the other hand, does not have the luxury of power or position. But although his memories are muddled, and he is agitated about that fact, he has the security of knowing the wrongs done to him and his family. As Kiš once noted in an interview, "The ethical position of the persecuted is more acceptable than that of the persecutor."²

Andi will not necessarily find his way to the effective maintenance of memories, and of culture, which Kiš might define as the preservation of group memories and practices *in situ*. In *Night and Fog*, Dr. Singer also fails at this. Perhaps Jakov will succeed.

The Parrot gives, purposefully, the feeling of generational conflict in the 1960s. It covers a bizarre evening of crime—by a disillusioned and perhaps disturbed young man who, in the company of an imaginary parrot, has gone on a spree of burglaries in Belgrade—that ends in a highly unusual form of urban lynching. A political reading of this play would have the reader consider whether the intruder and the homeowners represent the newly stratified interest groups in the era of student demonstrations in

² "The Conscience of an Unknown Europe," in Susan Sontag, ed., *Homo Poeticus: Essays and Interviews* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), p. 214.

Yugoslavia in 1968—the neo-Marxists, looking to reclaim a role for critical idealism, versus the “red bourgeoisie” eager to secure its privileges under Tito’s fairly liberal regime—or whether both sets of characters attest to the ideological exhaustion of the epoch. Possibly the young man is a metaphor for the rapacious Partisans who expropriated the Belgrade middle class. But the elements of absurdity cannot be left out of the equation: the apartment belongs to a family with the name (roughly) of “Stinkblossom”, the parrot eats so much preserved fruit (and jams, jelly, etc.) that he constantly gets sick, and the trio get mired in an almost slapstick cycle of “Who’s on first?” pseudo-conversation.

The Parrot occupies some of the same emotional space as *A Wooden Trunk for Thomas Wolfe* and *Night and Fog*. We are brought into an intense world of conversation and contestation where a limited number of characters, just two or three, pursue their own agendas, typically one in each that is vaguely defensive and one vaguely on offense. The burglar’s preposterous, fragile pretenses and the parrot’s silly name (“Bubi”—a name usually used for dogs but reminiscent of the familiar German “Bubi” or Yiddish “Bubeleh”) belie the seriousness of the encounter. The mass shooting (beware inverted definitions!) serves to remind us of Kiš’s unflagging desire to testify, quietly, individually, cerebrally, on behalf of the outsiders, the peripheral and marginalized, to whom majorities deal abjection and death.

A number of people in Serbia who knew Kiš well, and for whom I have great intellectual respect, have told me over the years that *A Wooden Trunk for Thomas Wolfe* is their favorite of his plays. My personal favorite is *Night and Fog*, and I translated that one first, but *Thomas Wolfe* has the advantage of being a meta-work about artists and creativity. In this play, a young man named Jakov, who survived the Shoah as an orphan and was then brought up in state institutions under the communist government, befriends an elderly doctor, Solomon, who also lost his family in the concentration and death camps of Nazi Germany. Both men hope, silently, to find a new sense of family with the other, but hanging over every tempestuous scene—for the two men are not really very compatible—is the

ominous shadow of unprocessed memory. The doctor senses that his powers are fading and he will never honor the dead by writing an important book about the Holocaust; the younger claims to want to do it but lacks discipline, confidence, patience, and pretty much everything else needed to be a successful writer, especially on so weighty a theme. The claustrophobic atmosphere of hypochondria, deceit and debilitation grows more and more sterile and isolated as the play develops. There is a rising level of menace in the play, too. More and more characters appear who have shaved heads, like the camp inmates and orphans who figure in the reminiscences of both characters, and the past seems to be seeping into the present more and more. In addition, the strange leering man in a nearby high-rise puts us in a mind of the lethal observers perched in surrounding windows at the conclusion of *The Parrot*.

Some of Solomon's flashbacks recall territory that Kiš explored in his first Holocaust novel, *Psalm 44*; some of Jakov's early life trauma calls to mind the testimony of Andreas Sam in *Night and Fog*. If the plot of this play is, to some, a touch too predictable, the autobiographical touches regarding survival, memory, and art impart a fresh emotional edge that does give the work great value. Religious imagery is, for instance, fairly abundant, and it is employed in an authentic and measured way with powerful lyrical effect in terms of artistry and emotion; there is the intonation of Jewish prayers, songs, and music, and references to the Belgrade Jewish community, and the introduction to the reader of a tortured writer-survivor who, in this case as a composite figure, resembles in some ways the unforgettable Jurij Golec from Kiš's story collection *The Lute and the Scars*. The allure of the sea and coast evokes the bohemian dreams of *Mansarda*. While tossing manuscripts into a crate or trunk does not equate to repopulating an ark with new texts, the image nonetheless intrigues for two reasons. As a profane repository of lived experience, akin to the "garbage heaps" about which Kiš wrote most provocatively in two poems, it is first of all evidence of the writer's connection and receptivity to the world. In addition the crate is a resource-studded set of stratified sediments that reminds the writer of his or her future tasks. "The trash can, like the cemetery, is a great repository of the world, its very essence," said

Kiš in a 1985 interview. “Random juxtaposition makes for strange and wonderful combinations. As in Lautréamont’s formula.”³ In terms of religious imagery, we are likely on firmer ground in the play when we look at things like the flaking, worn mirror in the elevator and think of the Jewish custom of covering mirrors during a period of mourning.

The Mechanical Lions is Kiš’s most extensive play and deserves an interpretive monograph of its own. It is based on the stories of *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, Kiš’s 1976 mega-hit. There is an eponymous story, about the main character, Novski (Novsky in most English translations), in that volume, but it is closely connected by ideas, and usually setting, to the other stories. Indeed, Kiš’s collection of short stories, whether or not it is considered a novel, does bear in the original the subtitle “seven chapters of one shared story.” And in the dramatic version here under discussion this is doubly true, for the eponymous story “A Tomb for Boris Davidovich” is clearly joined by two other stories from the book as sources for the drama: “The Mechanical Lions” and “Magic Card Dealing.”

When Kiš, in the 1970s, decided to turn his artistic attentions to the misery caused by the other totalitarianism (his word) of the 20th century, communism, he chose the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union for the setting in which to develop his ideas. Here, as usual, Kiš refuses to separate out Stalinism from other (milder?) forms of communism. But equally important is the presence, even in his 1976 collection—conceived of as a type of expose and broadside against willfully ignorant Western intellectuals—of violence that stems from other kinds of exclusion and mass intolerance, as in the scenes of anti-Semitism in the Tsarist army. Kiš also chose to concentrate in the Boris Davidovich stories and play on what we might call the “true believers”, communist sympathizers, activists, or agents who are eventually sacrificed by the system in the most fundamental and bloody of ways. This provides ample room for discussion, by students of international communist movements,

³ See “Naming Is Creating,” in Susan Sontag, ed., *Homo Poeticus: Essays and Interviews* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), p. 208–209.

of parallels with Arthur Koestler's remarkable classic, the novel *Darkness at Noon* (1940), as well as with many other fictional, autobiographical, and biographical works. Despite clearly recognizing the historical and polemical importance of the discussions that this play was meant to spark, Kiš also wrote elsewhere with great conviction about the artistic paradox of writing any kind of "camp literature". If a great crime of dictatorships is "reducing human beings to a single dimension, the dimension of a *zoon politikon*, a political animal," it is also true that "the description and impassioned condemnation of [this type of] social injustice [... and] the triumph of engagement" has the effect of robbing people "of our wealth, metaphysical thought, and poetic sensibility."⁴ The result is indeed a paradox, but it is unavoidable. One partial protection is experimentation; one possible antidote is poetry.

The plot of *The Mechanical Lions* is non-linear and bounces back and forth from the late Tsarist period to the purges of the 1930s. With the right staging, including music and costumes and frequent set changes, it would make a very powerful dramatic presentation, perhaps more of a crowd-pleaser due to its clearly expressed (and abundant) intellectual content and large amount of action. The basis for the play is the career, and ultimately the disastrous end, of an "Old Bolshevik" named Boris Davidovič Novski. He is a brilliant, committed revolutionary as well as a Casanova and man of the world—an impossible combination in Soviet Russia, as it turns out. We are ushered through a rich visual display of different worlds: the affected, salacious salon life of pre-Revolutionary St. Petersburg; the harassment and humiliation faced by rural Jews in the same time period; colorful tales of undercover derring-do; the mind-numbing endlessness of secret police interrogations; and the brutality of quick political executions and the protracted cruelty of long-term imprisonment in the Gulag. Ultimately, one might argue, the play is as much about the nature of biography as it is about communism. Over and over again Novski is asked to clarify or alter the details of his dossier, his biography, and his self-esteem

⁴ See "Homo Poeticus, Regardless," in Susan Sontag, ed., *Homo Poeticus: Essays and Interviews* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), pp. 78–79.

and view of the world are pared down to a kind of irreducible minimum that is honest but, in the end, fragile. To his Novski's cavalier (and perhaps self-serving) assertion to one of his elegant pre-war lovers that true revolutionaries deserve no biography separate from the history they fold themselves into, Kiš opposes Novski's exotic suicide in the Siberian labor camp. Is this simply an *auto-da-fé*, a fulfillment of the admonition of the investigating magistrate, Fedjukin, a confirmation of the anti-individualist menace specifically of extremist left-wing ideology? Or is it a prompt towards understanding that otherness always has its price? Perhaps any one of us, an attractive polymath political figure like Novski or (switching to the world of autobiographical references) an unattractive (mostly) polymath apolitical figure like Kiš's father—that is to say, any of us, and brains are no salvation—can be expunged completely from history, leaving others in need of our emotional or intellectual legacy to piece together our “muddy tales”?

In *Electra*, the aggrieved daughter of Queen Clytemnestra is trying to survive the aftermath a horrific act of perfidy and a *coup d'état*, involving her mother and her lover, the newly crowned Aegisthus; she is also engineering a major campaign of retribution to avenge the murder of her father, King Agamemnon, in the post-Trojan War period, and in doing so she makes common cause with some old family allies and her exiled brother, Orestes. The play is full of tense evocations of the evils perpetrated by the lovers and usurpers, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus; of anxious entreaties to the gods for wisdom and strength in the face of the unenviable task of plotting a family murder; and, in the end, of gory and very personal killings.

Electra depicts part of one of the most storied knots of plots, characters, and ideas in all of literature: the tribulations of the house of Agamemnon in the decades before and after the Trojan War. Agamemnon, a powerful Greek ruler with the specific title of King of Mycenae, came from a line of powerful monarchs and played a major role in that war. The conflict between Troy and Greece is historically attested, and since it forms the setting or backdrop for an entire cluster of elemental oral and literary works

such as *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Aeneid*, it links both Greece and Rome to the rest of the Mediterranean world. This is similar to the existence of Agamemnon himself, who is both historically attested as well as culturally fruitful). He had a far-flung family that included such literary luminaries as Iphigenia and Menelaus as well as the easily recognizable characters in this work, and was involved in various ways with Cassandra, Achilles, and the Furies. As is the case with many key literary characters from the classical world, Electra appeared in the work of many Greek and Roman playwrights, and those dramas were just the starting blocks for a literary trajectory that continues in new modes to this day.

Kiš's interest in Electra was, as we see from his own notes on the play, largely professional. It was a commission for him, and it also posed technical problems that he seems to have set about solving with relish. Only in couple of the stories in *The Encyclopedia of the Dead*, in an essay or two, and in the unfinished novel *Legenda o spavačima* from 1967–1968 (found in the posthumous volume *Skladište*), does Kiš touch on explicitly classical or ancient themes. In this matter of topics, as in methods, he was very much a twentieth-century writer. But arguably the tyranny on the loose in Electra's native kingdom provides a bridge between this classical excursion and Kiš's main theater of operations. In addition, the inability of religion to restrain or comfort men and women caught up in the vortex of violence, the flashes of Freudian humor, and judicious doses of graphic, painful imagery (here attributed to the inspiration of the French founder of Theater of Cruelty) present us with elements of continuity in this and Kiš's main works. His discussion of the commonalities between the stark landscapes and brutal moral dichotomies of Cacoyannis' film version of *Electra* brings Hellenic tragedy home to the Balkans; here one cannot help but note the titanic efforts of the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare to make the same point. Kiš and Kadare, who met several times in Paris in the 1980s, have parallel interests in repatriating the classical Greeks to the Balkans, thereby giving a more legitimate pedigree to blood feuds and other primitive, clan-related aspects of "Dinaric" behavior. Their stopping points in tracing and valorizing the cultural family tree of the Balkans, however, are quite differ-

ent, since Kadare is after the earliest, purest possible germination of the Albanian nation and Kiš's concern is a more generalized reflection on violence, its reproduction, and its emotional toll on individuals.

Coming up with a good translated title for *Marin Držić Always Lands on His Feet* was not easy. The original is entitled simply *Marin Držić Vidra*, with *vidra* (Eng: "otter"), a nickname that the great Croatian writer apparently bore in his lifetime and which comes over into English as something like "a resourceful person" with a slight tinge of inconstancy around the edges. The title used here is meant to convey a bit of that ambiguity and also give a sort of vague 1960s feel to its presentation. The screenplay is actually meant to be funny only in a few spots, as when Držić is entertaining visiting diplomats. But Marin Držić did lead a rollicking and rebellious life and so matches the spirit of the decade in which this work originated—and the spirit of the Yugoslav esthetic and political innovators who, like Kiš, made Držić an object of study and admiration.⁵

This work is more of a treatment or synopsis than an actual screenplay; prose, supplemented by short notes, predominates over dialogue and stage directions. But the visual virtues of a film are clearly present in embryonic form. And the story, however often it has been told, is a good one. It begins with the arrival of the plague in 16th-century Dubrovnik. Young Držić (1508–1567), who shares the name Don Marin with his father, is the scion of a prosperous and cultured family. He takes his vows and joins the priesthood amidst the general crisis. He was once a playboy and remains the bearer of unconventional ideas. He follows his artistic bent by playing the organ for the cathedral, until he decides to go off to Italy to study. The tumultuous political history of that era is mirrored in the Council debates about the worthiness of Držić's family and

⁵ Besides Kiš, other well-known writers such as Miroslav Krleža and Antun Šoljan also invoked Držić's subversive reputation in their works. They were joined by theater directors such as Ivica Kunčević. The way for such revisionist approaches to the Catholic Croatian past was paved by the works of literary historians such as Josip Pupačić and Zivko Jeličić. I thank Leo Rafolt of the University of Zagreb for this insight.

the amount of stipend or subsidy he should be given in Siena—all of which underscores Držić's interest in making the Council more democratic.

At university, Držić is an overachiever but, again, a troublemaker, running afoul of church and political authorities due to rowdy behavior, an egalitarian streak, and disregard for censorship. The restless Držić returns home and the rest of his life is telescoped into scenes of various jobs he holds, from interpreter and aide-de-camp to a visiting Austrian diplomat to customs clerk to priest, again. Along the way we are treated to references to and excerpts from his most famous plays, above all the comedy *Dundo Maroje*. Finally, after a protracted discussion of the shortcomings of Dubrovnik's oligarchy and of the precariousness of its international situation, Držić dies a mysterious death, possibly as a result of his appeals to foreign potentates for help in hatching a plot against his city's rotten leadership.

It is a tribute to Kiš's cosmopolitanism that he embraced a Croatian cultural figure to this degree. Regardless of its contemporary topicality, Kiš's screenplay becomes a kind of testament to his Yugoslavism, especially when considered in the light of the essays and interviews in which he expresses his great admiration for the work of Miroslav Krleža and other leading South Slavic authors. And it is characteristic of the learned precision with which he gathered material, honed it to the right specifications, and employed it with lapidary technique that Kiš wrote this screenplay with so much sixteenth-century Dalmatian vocabulary.⁶ Sometimes he includes a standard Serbo-Croatian equivalent after a dialectal word, but often he does not do so. This taxes the best local dictionaries and the ken of North American translators, to be sure. But the amount of local color and the *zeitgeist* Kiš manages to evoke in this piece

⁶ Fortunately the English-language historiography on Dubrovnik, or the Ragusan Republic, is reasonably advanced. For a fine recent study, see Robin Harris, *Dubrovnik: A History* (London: Saqi, 2006). Other very useful monographs include Bariša Krekić, *Dubrovnik: A Mediterranean Urban Society, 1300–1600* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1997); Krekić, *Dubrovnik in the 14th and 15th Centuries* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972); and Zdenko Zlatar, *Between the Double Eagle and the Crescent: The Republic of Dubrovnik and the Origins of the Eastern Question* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1992);

make the reading of it worthwhile in any language. We see Dubrovnik and its pride in its representative government, clever diplomacy, and commercial adroitness; but we also note its exposure to and great fear of plague and perfidy (only fire seems to be missing!). Enemies of liberty abound: the Turks, the Spaniards, the “Germans”. But they are not always foreign nations, since corrupt officials are degrading the spirit and traditions of the Ragusans. The church and its offspring, the university, offer both educational and artistic opportunity and disappointing small-mindedness and conservatism. At the end of the play we have yet another unclarified death, echoing in a minor way the demise of so many other noble minds in Kiš’s universe. But the humanism of the era, especially vivid in the melancholy poems recited by the hermit from the island, Mavro Vetranović, stands as a possible antidote to pessimism. This humanism is centered in the mission of the writer, evidence of which we have before us to this day.

The screenplay *Končarevci* (“*A Factory Story*”) is very thoroughly, even completely, developed. It is broken down into scenes, provided with establishing shots and all kinds of prompts and settings, and outfitted with full dialogue. It’s a shame it was never turned into the film for which it was conceived. The movie would have begun in a Yugoslav Siemens plant in the late 1930s, with a few registers of the vast difference in wealth and culture between the managers and the workers. But almost immediately we skip to the end of World War II, as Tito’s Partisans are breaking into the plant and beginning a debate about whether to wreck it or renovate it. Obviously they get the factory back on its feet again, and then the sociology of Yugoslav industrialization kicks in: mobilizing peasant labor, including many young women, to move to the city and staff the electronics factory; technical and political education of the Party cadres; the hunt for collaborators and saboteurs; the partial rehabilitation of highly skilled scientists and engineers with dubious political pedigrees; and the need for autarky and even greater vigilance after the Tito-Stalin rupture and the imposition of the Comintern blockade against the Belgrade government in 1948. We follow the factory community’s

development through a number of characters who are in conflict with the government and with each other. By the 1960s a different set of processes is in play in the work environment: temptations of corruption, the lingering power of the state's security organs, and the importance of family life and retirement security. There are many interesting characters and many chances to observe the rituals of reward and the corrosive effects of propaganda and a lack of transparency in business and government operations. The scenes set in the 1960s betray the presence of a largely invisible film crew, adding meta-perspectives to certain dialogues, which are basically a film within a film. The movie ends, or would have ended, with a sense of the changing of the guard in the factory, and indeed in the country; the final scene, an interview along the banks of the Sava River at sunset, with one of the long-time managers who has been fishing and now is eager to head off in his car through the bumpy fields of corn stubble, leaves us with little confidence that memory—whether in the media or not—will serve the history of the factory well. Either crimes and failures will remain unexorcised due to Party pressure, or the achievements and good times in the factory community will be overshadowed by revelations of scandal, or both.

The set pieces representing the esthetics of socialist realism and “volunteerism”—almost *tableaux* because of their self-explanatory and static cinematic value—correspond to similar didactic scenes in the work of Ismail Kadare. They give great texture to the screenplay, which in other places rolls quickly from scene to scene or zig-zags its way through short dialogues. There are plenty of witty cuts and brief absurd situations that lend humor à la Kiš and make the screenplay accessible. The very end of the play, like a number of other scenes throughout of workers' assemblies and ceremonies, smacks of Dušan Makavejev's outstanding film *Man Is Not a Bird* (1965), complete with symphonic arrangements of Beethoven for indifferent workers.

INTRODUCTION

THE PLAYS IN THE BROADER BIOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Study of the dramatic works of Danilo Kiš adds important dimensions to our understanding of his biography. Kiš sometimes eschewed the designation of “professional writer” and never really lived off income from his books alone; his many years of teaching in a number of cities in France are mentioned often, even by Western reviewers, and every serious critic and connoisseur of his works takes account of his many, even voluminous, translations from French, Russian, Hungarian, and other languages. Kiš was even part of a team that translated Vietnamese poetry from the era of the U.S. war in Indochina.⁷

Discussion of Kiš’s plays and screenplays, his motivations for undertaking them, his methods of writing them, and his fellow Yugoslavs’ reactions to them significantly broadens our appreciation of Kiš’s artistry. If Kiš’s writing focuses, thematically at any rate, on three main ideas—the mournful fate of outsiders, the relentless quest of the son to recreate the biography of a complicated and lost father, and the historical equivalence of the two great, violent ideological dictatorships (totalitarianisms) of the 20th century—then we can be glad that these seven texts deliver plenty of new permutations and insights on those subjects.

Someday Kiš’s biographers, at least his literary ones, will need to analyze his dramatic corpus in the full light of his theoretical and stylistic concerns as well. Can the argument not be made that Kiš was not necessarily inclined to value drama a great deal, at least in terms of his own creative needs? Drama, in and of itself, by virtue of its being separated, teased out, refined, staged, perhaps abstracted, runs the risk, one might argue, of a certain inauthenticity.⁸ And if plays and movies rely on a kind of magic, on “hocus-pocus and abracadabra”, then why would the end of such performances not

⁷ See *Druže, tvoja kuća gori : izbor iz vijetnamske poezije* (Beograd: Udruženje književnika Srbije, 1968).

⁸ See “Variations on Central European Themes,” in Susan Sontag, ed., *Homo Poeticus: Essays and Interviews* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), p. 113.

invariably leave us disenchanted?⁹ And why would not the artistic and moral values of screen and stage not run counter to Kiš's oft-proclaimed core ethos that life, not fantasy, is the source of his art?

It is true that Kiš's writings on literature as the "concretization of abstract history," as the means by which history's indifference and multiplicity is made individual and memorable, do tend to focus on prose. Yet, within this framework, he frequently experimented with various means of capturing the spirit of an idea, of memorializing a vanished culture, and of etching suffering into our memories to avoid (not its repetition, for Kiš was far too humble and focused on art to arrogate the role of prophet, reformer, or moralist to himself) the unbearable insult of its oblivion or commodification, he also valued the cathartic function of literature.¹⁰ Communication, Kiš believed, took the edge off of hopelessness, and an important measure of a writer's ultimate value is his or her ability to make sense of the world and, through the memory of real times and places and people, provide a modicum of hope to everyone.¹¹ And catharsis is a well-known attribute of theater. Kiš also experimented frequently with various idioms to capture ideological mindsets and with *bricolage*, point of view, and various conceptions of "scenes", "chapters", and dialogue. He was convinced that a hide-bound predilection for realism set back cultural and political progress, and that an experimental, expanding canon beyond the control of elites proved the maturity of a society.¹² Therefore, why would Kiš not also want to experiment with the possibilities of stage and screen?¹³

A few words on the title of this introductory essay are in order at this point. Words used in the title, such as drama, boundaries, and borders are meant to focus readers on what is, for most of us, new in

⁹ See "Schizopsychology," in Susan Sontag, ed., *Homo Poeticus: Essays and Interviews* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), pp. 60–61.

¹⁰ See "Naming Is Creating," in Susan Sontag, ed., *Homo Poeticus: Essays and Interviews* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), p. 207.

¹¹ See "Mi pevamo u pustinji," in *Homo Poeticus* (Zagreb-Belgrade: Globus/Prosveta, 1983), pp. 72–77.

¹² See "Za pluralizam" in *Homo Poeticus* (Zagreb-Belgrade: Globus/Prosveta, 1983), pp. 78–82.

¹³ For Kiš's battle against "the monotony of a given style" and for "the use of the most varied literary devices," see "All the Genes of My Reading," in Susan Sontag, ed., *Homo Poeticus: Essays and Interviews* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), p. 163.

approaching Danilo Kiš through his dramas and screenplays. Drama is inherent, Kiš might say, in the historical condition, because of conflict and violence and pain. And the human condition is nothing if not historical. Art grows from the human condition, from life. “The story that I am about to tell [...]”, Kiš writes on the first page of the original (prose) version of *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, “has only the misfortune (some call it the fortune) of being true.”¹⁴ By some transitive property of art, then, perhaps Kiš’s world view is excellently suited to the production of dramas and screenplays. The boundaries that are apparent here are those of genre; obviously it is Kiš’s dramatic writings, like his poetry, that are the least-known aspect of his literary output. He came to this genre only late in his career, but he crossed the boundaries into stage and cinema, I would argue, with great clarity of purpose, forethought, and success.¹⁵ Finally, we have the borders. Kiš’s work was, like him, I suppose, always international, always cosmopolitan. But perhaps these works intensify that characteristic. As a compliment to Kiš’s appreciation of contemporary Hungarian poets such as György Petri and Ferenc Juhász, for instance,¹⁶ we have here the cross-border drama of the ominously titled (and essentially exposé-like) *Night and Fog*. And we have a full-blown play about classical Greece and another about Renaissance Croatia, and thus fall borders between time periods. A great deal of specifically Russian detail, from samovars and salon speech to prison-camp argot and details about the Siberian winter are built into *Mechanical Lions*. The flood of international ramifications of the Tito-Stalin split of 1948 looms large in *Končarevci*, while the mood of protest and anxiety and recrimination behind *The Parrot* links Yugoslav current events to contemporary happenings in the US, France, Mexico, and many other countries.

¹⁴ *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, translated by Duška Mikić-Mitchell (New York: Penguin, 1980), p. 3.

¹⁵ For more on Kiš’s work in the Serbian theater scene, see the untranslated autobiographical essay “Preludij za ludnicu” in *Skladište*, ed. Mirjana Miočinović (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1995), pp. 153–164. For fascinating thoughts on the origin of his TV dramas, see “Gorki talog iskustva” in *Gorki talog iskustva*, 2nd ed., edited by Mirjana Miočinović (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1991), pp. 9–14.

¹⁶ Kiš published essays on both of these contemporary poets. For a complete discussion of Kiš’s engagement with Hungarian poetry, as translator and reviewer and admirer, see Marko Čudić, *Danilo Kiš i modern mađarska poezija* (Belgrade: Plato, 2007).

Study of these dramatic works also adds important dimensions to our understanding of Yugoslav society in the Tito decades. As I have argued elsewhere, Kiš's lampooning of propaganda and socialist realism in *Končarevci* is very well wrought, and his nearly encyclopedic tour through the socialist workplace in that same screenplay is invaluable.¹⁷ That daily life in Yugoslavia and Hungary comes across much as daily life anywhere is not due to a lack of effort at characterization on the author's part; it is simply a fact, a testament to the common evolution of European societies prior to 1945. Kiš's texts do register certain cultural specificities that have nothing to do with the political. Of greater general interest might be the awareness of just how durable the Yugoslav communist sensitivity to anti-Stalinist arguments really was. What Kiš highlighted in the communist pieces—the prostitution of justice, the blinders of dialectical thinking, hypocrisy, untruthful art and discourse—is buttressed by an appreciation of how controversial a related book like *7000 Days in Siberia* (1971), written by Kiš's friend, the Croat Karlo Štajner, proved to be.

Finally, it is interesting to note that non-textual evidence of Kiš's television, cinematic, and theater engagement exists to this day. Radio TV Serbia has shown *Night and Fog* in recent years; the 1968 production, under an hour in length, still exists in integral form and is occasionally put up by enthusiasts on social media sites. A more elaborate version of another play, *Thomas Wolfe* (recorded 1973), seems only to exist in part but is also occasionally accessible. These items, along with a few other dramatic productions connected to Kiš¹⁸ constitute an important set of sources for the study of publishing, intellectual life, and material culture in Yugoslavia, especially when considered together with the surviving recordings of interviews and speeches that he gave in his lifetime.

By John K. Cox

¹⁷ See John K. Cox, "Pannonia Imperiled; or Why Danilo Kiš Still Matters," in *History* 96:321 (October 2012), p. 602.

¹⁸ The Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) maintains that a filmed version of *The Parrot* (1970) exists, as does a posthumous film based on Kiš's *Electra* from 1993. Unfortunately, I have not been able to view either.

NIGHT AND FOG



CHARACTERS

A YOUNG MAN (ANDREAS)

MARIJA RIGO

EMIL



YOUNG MAN: I'm looking for Mrs. Rigo. Marija Rigo.

Marija Rigo keeps the door half-closed, on the chain.

MARIJA RIGO (*coolly*): That's me.

YOUNG MAN: May I come in? (*Reaches for doorknob.*)

MARIJA RIGO: Excuse me, but...with whom do I have the honor of...?

YOUNG MAN: Ah, do you know, ma'am, what you told me back then, twenty years ago? You don't recall? You said to me, "You're going to end up a well-known man, a doctor, a writer, an engineer, or maybe an actor...and one day you will return to our little town and look up your good old teacher, Mrs. Rigo... By then," you said, "I'll be an old gray-haired lady, forgotten by everyone, even by my children, and I'll be pondering the question: 'My God, what became of my pupils? Which way did the winds of fate blow them? Where are they now? What are they up to? Hundreds of them, thousands of my pupils—where are they all now?'" That's what you said, Mrs. Rigo.

MARIJA RIGO: Ahhh—one of my pupils...Come inside, come on. Welcome!

The young man enters. As he takes a seat and looks around the apartment, he keeps talking.

YOUNG MAN: Thank you. This is a good spot for me. I'll sit...(*Sits down on the edge of the ottoman.*)...You said, "Yes, so you'll be returning to our region, to our little town, and I won't recognize you; maybe you'll come in a car or even with your own chauffeur, or maybe with your wife. She's a beauty, to whom you'll introduce me like this: 'Here, Mrs. Rigo, this is my fiancée...And this is my teacher, Mrs. Rigo.'"

MARIJA RIGO: Aren't you the little Žilinsky boy, the one whose father was a game-warden?

YOUNG MAN: You missed, ma'am, but just by two benches and—and this is more important—by four years. Žilinsky was in the fourth grade when I first enrolled in the school.

MARIJA RIGO: I don't know. I really don't know anymore...How many of you were there, my child—if you'll allow me to call you that? How many passed through my life...But, where was that? It wasn't...perhaps...

YOUNG MAN: You're on the right track, Mrs. Rigo! Yes, it was back when you still lived in the village. 1942, 1943, '44...right through to '45.

MARIJA RIGO (*now somewhat confused and a little more distant*): Yes, judging by your age, it was a long time ago...Are you perhaps...No, I'm not getting anywhere by guessing... It's been a long time, and those were difficult years...

YOUNG MAN: Twenty years ago...And who knows if my name will mean anything to you today...Maybe you don't even remember my name...ANDREAS...Does that tell you anything? ANDREAS?

Mrs. Rigo studies him from all sides, thinking back.

MARIJA RIGO: Andreas...Andreas...Oh, I recall! Andreas Maly, the little Czech lad. Your father was the bandmaster for the local fire brigade! That's it!

The young man shakes his head.

MARIJA RIGO: Off the mark again...(*A little upset now.*) I can't—I'll admit it—I can't remember, Andreas. If it's not Andreas Kiš...No? Of course not. He's a lot younger than you...I've lost

my marbles...Andreas Kiš can't be any older than eighteen... twenty...No, really, my boy, I cannot recall any one else called Andreas: Žilinsky, Maly, Kiš...Popov...No, no he's younger, too. Miletić...oh, what am I thinking? That one's one of my husband's comrades, much older than you, and his first name is not even Andreas. Nope, I admit I'm totally stumped here: I just don't know...But I'll bet you haven't had lunch yet, have you? Excellent. I'll give you some sustenance.

She is talking from the other room, as the plates clatter.

MARIJA RIGO (*off*): Would you like a glass of *rakija*?—Let us give the stranger something to eat, that unknown man who might be meaning to rob me...

YOUNG MAN (*loudly*): For goodness' sake, Mrs. Rigo!

MARIJA RIGO: And to cart off all the moolah I have painstakingly saved up and that I keep in a big—are you listening to me?

YOUNG MAN: For goodness' sake, ma'am...

MARIJA RIGO: ...in a big stocking under my pillow...

YOUNG MAN: Don't go to any trouble on my account, dear lady...I am not hungry at all. I could drink some *rakija*, but that's about it...

MARIJA RIGO: No, no, you have to eat something, even if it's just as punishment for having tormented your good old teacher like this...

YOUNG MAN: For God's sake, lady, I didn't mean to insult you. I was just really curious. And so I said to myself: I will look up that good old teacher of mine, like I promised her I'd do twenty years ago, and she will recognize me immediately, and she'll say...

Mrs. Rigo comes in with a tray.

MARIJA RIGO: Voilà—the punishment for disobedient pupils. No, no, I won't insist that you tell me your last name. That's fine. I'll call you Andreas; your surname isn't important... Very well, till Emil comes home I'll just enjoy this *apéritif* with the dangerous robber who keeps his name secret and hides his face behind a mask...But, seriously, do you remember my Emil?

YOUNG MAN: I believe I'd recognize him...black-haired, heavy-set, large dark eyebrows, trimmed black moustache.

MARIJA RIGO: He cut that off. When it started going gray, he shaved it off...At first it was horrible for me...Believe you, I even cried about it. It seemed like my old Emil had died, God forbid! Emil *sans moustache*! From the day we became acquainted, thirty years ago, I had only ever known Emil with a moustache. So after he had shaved it off, I said to him: oh, Emil, Emil! I really would have preferred—may God forgive me for this—to have seen you today missing an arm, or an eye, rather than the moustache! Truth be told, I think he cut it off because he had started going gray, but he swore to me that it was just a coincidence. He had just trimmed it with the electric razor and then quietly said to himself, “Seriously, Emil, what would it be like if you shaved it all the way off for once?” That’s what he says, anyway. “Old Marija, she’ll laugh herself silly.” Imagine: it never even occurred to him that I might start to cry...But later I grew accustomed to it...People can get used to anything, right?

YOUNG MAN (*absentmindedly*): Oh, yes. To be sure...

MARIJA RIGO (*perplexed*): I don’t know what’s up with him. He went to a meeting. You know, he has a lot to do on this committee.

YOUNG MAN: Mr. Emil used to have—and this part I remember exactly—a signet ring on his left hand. A large, black signet ring with which he used to thump us on the head when we didn’t hold our pencils correctly.

MARIJA RIGO: He no longer has that ring, either...Poor Emil! He suffered a lot during the war...They took the ring from him in Russia, when he became a POW...Now he has a different one. An ordinary ring. I bought it for him for our silver wedding anniversary. So, Emil was your teacher, too?

YOUNG MAN: Only a few days, when he had to sub for you...He was very strict...

MARIJA RIGO: Oh, Emil is a very sound pedagogue. You probably had no idea. It’s just that he gets nervous. Then again he’s always been that way, even with his own children...Do you know our children?

YOUNG MAN: Of course, ma'am. The older boy, Anton, was in the same grade I was. And the younger one, Otto...

MARIJA RIGO: Otto is an officer today. He earns quite a good salary, but he spends it all on women. In that way he's a little like Emil. In his younger days he was quite the casanova. And, honestly, he caused me a lot of grief. Otto blows a lot of money on albums. It's madness, I tell you. Collecting classical music... Maybe that's a bit of a bright spot. Because it's better—so say I all the time to Emil—better that he spend his money on classical music; at least then it retains its value and enriches the mind. What if he collected this modern music? That's what I always say. That's what his friends do—the youth of today!... He was here not too long ago...But tell me, how did you find us here, actually? So you went to the village first?

YOUNG MAN: Yes, I went to the village first. And there they told me right away: "Mrs. Rigo moved away from here a long time ago. More than ten years ago"...I could have cried, completely losing track of you like that. But someone turned up who knew the name of the town you had gone to...And so here I am.

MARIJA RIGO: And whom did you manage to locate back in the village? One of your friends from the old days?

YOUNG MAN: I came to the village by automobile, around noon one day. I told the chauffeur to drive slowly. The farmers stared after the car in wonderment, like they used to do twenty years ago...You know, the people kept asking me when I had left—or, more precisely, I was asking myself: would I even recognize anyone? Did I know, and how exactly was I even supposed to know, whether this was actually the same village where twenty years ago I abandoned that little Andreas who comes to me in dreams at times still? Then I calmed down and said to myself: You're crazy! You are crazy, because even if the people change, the landscape stays the same. And this region was as familiar to me as the palm of my own hand. I just had to close my eyes and there was the river by the village, and there were the woods that belonged to the local nobleman. And I knew every tree, every bush, every flower. So I went on into the village and immediately recognized certain people. I looked at them and gave them a smile.

MARIJA RIGO: Surely you recognized old Uncle Andrija the mailman? I hear he's still delivering the mail...

YOUNG MAN: I asked Uncle Andrija right away whether there was any mail there for me, and I told him my name. He put on his spectacles and began rooting around among some old letters that had never been picked up. Spitting onto fingertips. Then he said: "No, there aren't any." And then he said to me, in a completely different tone of voice: "Hey, you're the one, aren't you, the one who poured sand into my post horn back then...I finally caught up with you, you little delinquent!"

MARIJA RIGO: Are you really the one who did that?

YOUNG MAN: No, I told him. Uncle Andrija, that wasn't me. It was Pavle Ezel, although, I said, I admit that we cooked up the idea together.

MARIJA RIGO: Pavle Ezel...Whose nickname was that? Wasn't it—ach! (*Sobs.*) I don't dare play this guessing game any more! One puzzle is enough for today...Let's get to the bottom of this one, first!

YOUNG MAN: They told me Ezel became—to be honest, I don't remember his surname, and they all still just call him Pavle Ezel—Ezel became a railroad conductor. He now works somewhere on the Athens-Belgrade-Budapest-Moscow line...or something along those lines.

Pause.

MARIJA RIGO: I don't know what is up with Emil. These meetings are really doing him in. If it's not the teachers' organization, it's the party, or the school board...Keep talking. I'll go check on the food. But, seriously, if you're hungry then we won't wait on Emil...At the very least an appetizer—a slice of ham or a bit of *salade russe*...That'd be ok, eh? A spot of fresh *salade russe* with our drinks...Just keep talking. I'm listening...Say, did you see...

YOUNG MAN: I visited several families, the ones that I remembered, the ones I remembered well, of course...Listen, Mrs. Rigo, don't make a fuss on my account. I'm really not hungry in the least. As I said: the ones I remembered well. And I explained to them who I was...

MARIJA RIGO: And did they remember? Or were you just as mysterious to them as you are to your old teacher?

YOUNG MAN: Oh, for sure—they remembered immediately. Old Mr. Horvat, the cobbler, you know, the one with the threshing machine...Well now they've gone and "nationalized" it, as he puts it. That means they've taken it away from him and put it on the collective farm...Uff-da, old man Horvath...I go to his place, knock on the door just as pretty as you please, and right away I can hear that he's still banging away just like in the old days, twenty years ago, and so in I go, "Good day to you! Good day! Pardon me," I say and pull out a shoe, "Excuse me, but could you put metal cleats on these shoes for me?" He takes the shoe, looks at it from all angles like a doctor, and hands it back. "I can do that," he says. "Have a seat and wait a moment..." Afterwards I take the shoe back, put it on, and say, "Mr. Horvat." I say, "Can you remember when you last re-soled my shoes?" "No sir, I can't remember if I ever re-soled your shoes," he said. "Well," I told him, "it was twenty years ago, exactly...Naturally you have no recollection of it, nor could you, since back then I had a shoe size of 30 or even a bit less." "And now it's at 46," he said with a laugh. "Back then you must have gone to school with my son Béla. He wears a 46 now, too..."

MARIJA RIGO: The Horvat lad, you say? I still refer to my ex-pupils as "lads." I say "the Žilinsky lad," "the Kiš lad," "the Horvat lad," but in the meantime, really, they are all of them all grown up, and today they have children of their own. And I still think of them all as little...Little Horvath has turned out to be an excellent engineer, some kind of specialist...He received a government prize for some project or other.

YOUNG MAN: Yes, and then I told him, naturally enough, who I was, and then he remembered immediately and he tossed aside the shoe he had repaired in his lap, and he took me into his house, where we began to chat, and where he told me...

Mrs. Rigo comes in with the meal.

MARIJA RIGO: It's really quite odd that Emil still isn't here...But don't hold back. Go ahead and take some salad, and as soon as

Emil arrives we'll have a proper lunch...Here, I brought a plate with me so you wouldn't be shy about...

YOUNG MAN: Oh, thank you, but you really needn't have put yourself out on my account...I'll wait till Mr. Rigo gets here...

MARIJA RIGO (*pours him a glass of rakija*): A bit more of this, then...This is very good *rakija*. I got it from a farmer. Help yourself to more—it stimulates the appetite. We don't have anything extraordinary to eat, anyway.

YOUNG MAN: "Yes," he says to me—it's Mr. Horvat, I mean—"I have some excellent wine." He was serving up a fresh ham: "It's a delightful old riesling," he said. "If you are a drinker." And there he had to laugh: "Of course," he said. "Of course you drink. You are every bit your father. And he—don't take this the wrong way, but he, poor bloke, could really put it away."

MARIJA RIGO: Are you then, perhaps...As your teacher I have the right to ask a question like this...I hope you're not...

YOUNG MAN: "Oh, no way. Nope," I say to him. "I don't drink like my father. But if the wine is good, why not go for the gusto?"

MARIJA RIGO: Aren't you the son of that...Good Lord, what am I saying—his son is twice your age...I was thinking of that, sorry, that—What was his name then?

YOUNG MAN: You mean Uncle Joška? Joška Čuturica?

MARIJA RIGO: Yes, but obviously...I mean, excuse me if...

YOUNG MAN: What the fathers sow, the sons reap...There's nothing horrible in that, except...May I pour myself another?

MARIJA RIGO: You betcha! No need to stand on ceremony. The bottle's right next to you; just pour away...I just hope you know your limit and won't get...

YOUNG MAN: Thank you.

MARIJA RIGO: I'm sorry—I keep interrupting you...So, what else happened?

YOUNG MAN: Where did I leave off?

MARIJA RIGO: With Mr. Horvat, the shoemaker...

YOUNG MAN: Yes, yes...Horvat the cobbler.

MARIJA RIGO: He said to you: "He"—that is you, rather—"could really put it away."

YOUNG MAN: Oh, yeah. Then his wife came home from work, and Uncle Martin came by to see them...I'm not sure exactly what his name is...It's his neighbor, anyway. Mr. Horvat said: "Do you two recognize this visitor?" They looked me over..."No," they said. "Andreas!" he said..."It's Andreas, Béla's friend. Don't you all remember?" They claimed to remember but it was obvious to me that they did not know who I was, except perhaps for Mrs. Horvath, who kept saying, "Andreas! Andreas!" in a voice that sounded pretty convincing. And then Mr. Horvath added: "My God. Andreas so-and-so, the son of that..."

MARIJA RIGO: Out with it already! Come on, say it...My patience is running out...You know women and their curiosity.

YOUNG MAN: Remind me later about that village conversation. I'll continue it another time...Let the puzzle be solved gradually...A mystery with the title: In Search of a Lost Boy. Chapter One: Recognition.

MARIJA RIGO: Super! Go on...Chapter Two...What's Chapter Two called?

YOUNG MAN: No, we're still in Chapter One. Part Two thereof... Then, at the conclusion of the conversation, I took my leave of them, inquiring off-handedly about their son, Béla, and about our friends, Otto, Popov, and the others; and then I also asked, just casually: oh, and what became of this girl Julija, oh, what was her name—we were in the same grade, you know. Little Julija? I only pretended to have forgotten her name—Julija Szabo, that little Hungarian girl...Oh, they told me, her name is no longer Szabo. She's a Popov now.

Mrs. Rigo leaps up from her easy chair, runs over to the young man, and embraces him.

MARIJA RIGO: Andreas Sam! Andreas Sam...(With tears in her eyes.) My God, why could I not recall that earlier? Little Andreas Sam, the son of Mr. Eduard Sam, the Sam boy, who was always cutting up with Julija Szabo...Andi, Andi, who could forget?... And I thought of you so often...(Confused.) Of you, and of your sister; of all of you. The name Julija Szabo was scarcely out of your mouth when I remembered her. Right away...(Wags her

finger menacingly at him.) You were probably thinking that your old teacher's completely lost her marbles and can't recollect anything anymore. Oh, you always were a big hooligan...A good-for-nothing, by God, just like my Otto...I know how much you used to horse around with little Julija...I knew it then...Oh, how happy Emil will be when he hears who has shown up for a visit. I'm really in the dark about what could be keeping him...Maybe I should send someone for him. So we know what's going on...To call him home...Ah, why couldn't I remember? When I look at you now: holy smokes, how much you've changed!...I recall that you used to go walking all the time with a big old dog, roaming the banks of the river...And you used to hide there with Julija, in an old barn...I know you. And I've caught you at last...Andi, Andi...Well, I've got to have a little drink to drink to that, even though the doctor has forbidden me from taking so much as a shot of *rakija*. Even before a meal. Nonetheless, on rare occasions I have a drop or two. To your health...

YOUNG MAN: To your health, ma'am...

MARIJA RIGO: Whoops! Hold on a second...(*Listens intently; the sound of the outside door being opened is audible.*) Surely that's Emil...We'll drink a glass, the three of us...Emil? Emil, is that you?

EMIL (*off*): These meetings of theirs are such an ordeal!

MARIJA RIGO: Emil, look who has dropped by for a visit...One of Otto's friends.

EMIL (*off*): Somebody always turns up who doesn't understand the party line on something, and so you and the comrades have to waste precious time...

Emil enters, shakes hands with the young man, and kisses Marija on the forehead.

EMIL: Forgive me, I'm a bit on the tired side...Darn it, Marija, why didn't you offer this comrade a bite to eat?...Must be because you were waiting on me...

YOUNG MAN: Oh, no, my teacher here has been a very gracious hostess, but believe you me...

MARIJA RIGO: Emil, he is a school chum of Otto's...

YOUNG MAN: Well, actually, of Anton's, to be precise.

EMIL: From the university?

MARIJA RIGO: Oh, no, Emil, for heaven's sake. This is one of my pupils from twenty years ago. He went to elementary school with Anton...

YOUNG MAN: Yes sir, twenty years ago.

MARIJA RIGO: Of course, Emil, you wouldn't recall Andreas, that little Andreas who...

EMIL: Why wouldn't I? I have the impression—his face seems very familiar to me...Honestly, though, I cannot actually remember exactly...the...hmm...the fundamental, how to put it, biographical data. But that this comrade is one of Otto's—

MARIJA RIGO: —one of Anton's—

EMIL: One of Anton's school chums, that much is clear to me. I mean, I recognized in you one of the...but, truth be told...

MARIJA RIGO: Don't strain yourself like that, Emil...Believe me, I didn't recognize him myself. And just imagine: till just now, before you got here, he had left me in the dark, like in a detective movie...He was so mysterious! Till he finally gave himself away...Can you guess how?

Marija Rigo goes off to the kitchen.

MARIJA RIGO (*off*): The potatoes have gotten a bit hard, but the meat will be superb...Emil, by God, it's all your fault...I am only sorry that...

YOUNG MAN: Mrs. Rigo really gave me a very gracious welcome...And I truly did not intend to take advantage of your hospitality.

EMIL: Oh please, please—not a peep about taking advantage! *Au contraire*. You're welcome here.

Mrs. Rigo comes in with the food.

MARIJA RIGO: Ah, but you'll have to wait a bit longer, Emil... (*Places the bowls on the table.*) Well, now, I wanted to drink this toast to the health of little Andreas Sam, my pupil...We were just about to do that when...

EMIL: How's that? (*To the young man.*) Aha! (*Pats him on the shoulder.*) But of course, Andreas Šram, Otto's friend, the one who...

MARIJA RIGO: You're way off, Emil...You're thinking of Otto's friend Andor Šram, but this is Andreas Sam...So then: Andi, Emil...(*They all reach for their glasses.*)...to my pupil, Andreas Sam!

They all empty their shot glasses.

EMIL: What name did you say, anyway? Sam, Andreas Sam?

YOUNG MAN: Yes, sir. Andreas Sam.

MARIJA RIGO: Obviously you can barely remember him...You only taught him on days you had to sub for me, which means, like, every...

YOUNG MAN: Yes, Mr. Rigo, you used to thump us on the head all the time...

EMIL: I can't believe this! Thumping?

YOUNG MAN: Yes, Mr. Rigo, you thumped us. With your middle finger that had a signet ring on it....

MARIJA RIGO: Andi, maybe you're exaggerating...As far as I'm aware, Emil was very sweet-tempered around the pupils.

EMIL: You know, I don't mean to contradict you, but, frankly, what you're saying there—that is, that I would ever, at any time in my life, have given my students welts on their heads from thumps with my signet ring—that seems like an out-and-out fantasy to me!...No...But, now, I know that in the juvenile psyche it can happen that...in this instance, along the line of resistance, some kind of psychic deformation can arise, a kind of deformed memory, which in turn is the result of some kind of shock. It is, how shall I say, a type of infantile *idée fixe*...

MARIJA RIGO: Let's take a seat at the table and get on with the food at last. There's no reason to delay any longer...

YOUNG MAN: I'm fine with this, ma'am, and, with your permission, I'll just sit over here, while you two eat...

MARIJA RIGO: That's fine, Andi, but you know that I very much regret that you cannot eat with us...But if someone's not hungry...

Emil sits down at the table, stuffs a white napkin into his collar, and begins to eat. He talks the whole time with his mouth full, and he eats slowly, like a gourmet.

EMIL: We're truly sorry about this...But, as the old saying goes, you can lead a horse to water...Just pour yourself some more... The *rakija* isn't bad...But that seems downright unbelievable, because since time immemorial—that is, since I have been occupied with the practice of pedagogy, that is, back in the days when I was still a village schoolteacher, and that has been quite some time, therefore, since time immemorial I have considered every physical compulsion, and all corporal punishments, to be unprofessional and inhumane, which in this case turns out to be one and the same thing, because ultimately pedagogy boils down to humanity, and vice-versa...

YOUNG MAN: Believe me, I only mentioned that in passing. One of the childhood memories that Mrs. Rigo and I...

EMIL: All right, all right. I am not offended, far from it, but I simply want to point out how certain things can become distorted, depending on the prism of memory, especially in cases of childhood memories...To put it simply, my ring came across to you as menacing in a moment when, let's say, when you had a guilty conscience because of some utterly naïve and infantile peccadillo; the ring seemed menacing to you somehow, dangerous even, like some sort of means of chastisement for wayward schoolchildren...

MARIJA RIGO: Don't I know it, Emil! He totally had occasion for a guilty conscience. He was always hanging around the young ladies.

EMIL: You see, that's how this deformation came into existence, this little psychic deformation, so that my ring came to you in a dream, or that you simply imagined that the teacher, this perpetually stern figure of a teacher, punishes kids by thumping their heads, and, furthermore, does so with this middle finger—which is highly interesting, by the way—this finger where a signet ring is located.

YOUNG MAN: You're right. Memories, especially childhood mem-

ories, are hard to revisit, and even harder to verify, because, actually, the witness, the sole and principal witness, no longer exists...

EMIL: You see? An outstanding example of...

YOUNG MAN: But, if you don't mind, this story with the signet ring, or rather this memory of the signet ring, resides in me, stubbornly. Irrefutably.

MARIJA RIGO: But really! You two are discussing quite inconsequential things. However that may be, you, Emil, must admit that you were always the nervous type, although, in all honesty, Andi, I know that Emil is a champion of alternative pedagogical methods and that he is against any type of corporal punishment.

EMIL: This story of the ring could manifest itself within you, namely as a memory, in the form of a retrospective impression, or in the form of a false memory. This could, as I say, originate in you just before, or even right at the moment when you caught sight of me. But only at the moment you glimpsed the signet ring on my finger. Thus you can see the extent to which the mechanism of such remembrances is, in essence, false and deceptive.

YOUNG MAN: But, fortunately, Mrs. Rigo can confirm that I...

MARIJA RIGO: Indeed, Emil. Andi was already talking about this ring before you got here. I asked him: "Do you remember Emil?" And he mentioned your ring at that point. He said: "On the middle finger of his right hand he wears a signet ring with which he used to thump us on the head"...That's precisely what he said: thump.

EMIL: All right...I do not maintain, nor have I ever held, that in this specific case this retrograde (so to speak) reaction, this false memory, in fact occurred in you. Rather I meant to say that this is how things are in principle with such recollections. That one may not always trust them, and that it very well could have transpired thus...that it could have been that way. So, look, I have, for example, this one memory of my time as a POW...

MARIJA RIGO: I said to Andi that it wouldn't be all that easy for you to remember him, since after all you spent most of the war in captivity...

YOUNG MAN: Yes, Mrs. Rigo told me you suffered a lot in the war...

EMIL: Oh, that was a real Golgotha for you...It's better if we don't speak of it.

YOUNG MAN: But, Mr. Rigo (if you will allow me to address you in the time-honored manner of schoolkids), Mr. Rigo, I thought—

EMIL: Certainly, certainly. It's of no significance what we call each other, particularly among friends...

YOUNG MAN: As I was saying, I thought that perhaps you would remember me by my father...His name you'd probably re—

MARIJA RIGO: Oh, actually, being so confused, and excited, I haven't gotten round to telling you, Emil...Yes, you two have sidelined me with this man-talk of yours. You won't let me get a word in edgewise. Emil, do you recall his father, Mr. Eduard Sam—

EMIL (*thinking it over*): Eduard Sam. Hmmm...Eduard Sam...During my incarceration in the Urals I had a friend whose name was Sam...

MARIJA RIGO: I don't think that's the man, right, Andi? Your poor father...

YOUNG MAN: No, definitely not. My father was not a POW in Russia.

EMIL: So you see? We're back to the mechanism of memory...This peculiar, unreliable, un—

MARIJA RIGO: Perhaps you have no recollection of him, Emil... Andi, in what year was your father deported?

YOUNG MAN: 1944.

MARIJA RIGO: And how long had you all lived there in the village?

YOUNG MAN: From 1941 on...To put it more precisely, since the beginning of the year 1941.

MARIJA RIGO: That means you might actually remember Mr. Sam, Emil...At least from hearsay...I know I told you about him once...He was a very tall gentleman, like Andi here, maybe even exceeding him in height. He wore glasses and carried a walking stick with an iron tip...

EMIL (*shaking his head*): No, I really can't call him to mind...

MARIJA RIGO: I told you about him once, Emil. That was the man who once—you'll recall—brought me wild eggplant. He was

very sophisticated; really, Andi, your father was a true gentleman, and very, very cultured. So one day he comes up to me with these eggplants. He was carrying them, if you can imagine it, in a hat. He was, with all that education, a bit...forgive me, Andi...a bit eccentric. And he said to me, "Mrs. Rigo, in these ominous days I want to take the time to show you a delicacy." Just imagine, Emil, I had never before in my life baked big blue eggplants. Not the cultivated ones, much less wild ones...I know I told you about it once...I have to tell you—the recipe was odd, but the eggplants turned out quite delicious, despite the fact that we were missing this spice and that...Then your late father said to me: "Do you know, Mrs. Rigo, what else these eggplants are lacking?" "No, Mr. Sam," I said to him. "Probably a spice, bay leaves, celery seed, parsnips, dill, *fines herbes*, pepper."—I just started listing them..."No," he said, after I had gone through the list. "No, Mrs. Rigo, the eggplants are close to perfection just as they are, without any spice... What they're lacking is a liter of good *Gewürztraminer*!"

EMIL: Say, Marusja, you know, we could really use—I mean, Comrade Andreas and myself—a spot of wine in this heat...

MARIJA RIGO: Of course, Emil. I'm just sorry that Andi hasn't had anything to eat. The alcohol is going to go to his head.

YOUNG MAN: You go right ahead, Mr. Rigo. I am perfectly happy with this *rakija* here.

Emil picks up a napkin, wiping his mouth as well as the sweat from his forehead. Mrs. Rigo has left the room to get wine.

EMIL: Okay, so I had just started saying—

YOUNG MAN: —Really sorry you can't remember my father. You know, I have actually come here on a pilgrimage, a pilgrimage of memories...I had thought that perhaps you would...

EMIL: Unfortunately I cannot recall your father...But I think Marusja actually did tell me that anecdote about the tomatoes.

YOUNG MAN: —about the eggplants.

EMIL: Yeah, the tomatoes or the eggplants. It doesn't matter. And this only proves, on the one hand, that I am gradually get-

ting old and—good grief!—senile. Your memory starts to go. And on the other hand this takes us back to this confounded mechanism for memories...Yes. I had begun telling you—and you were the one who reminded me of it, after all: in Siberia I had—I spent two agonizing years as a POW there—so in Siberia I had a companion, a prisoner like me, and he had the exact same name as your father. Sam. But I no longer recall his given name, and therefore I had thought that he was perhaps...

YOUNG MAN: No, he was certainly no relation of mine.

Emil lights a cigarette and offers one to the young man. He lights it for him with the lighter and then sinks down into an easy chair across from the visitor.

EMIL: Yes, this man Sam. Oh yes, his name was Oskar Sam. So I'm not completely addled. Well, I run into him in Novi Sad after the war, completely by accident, just "on the street" so to speak, in a milk-bar, although that's not important now. So then we went to Fisherman's Island and then over wine we started exchanging reminiscences from captivity...Marusja! Marusja—what's up with that wine?

MARIJA RIGO (*off*): Listen, Emil! I mean, this is a man's work! I almost sliced my finger open...(Comes in.) Here. There you go. Open the wine yourself, if you will. I worried myself half to death trying to find your corkscrew, and now I have to go and cut myself?...Andreas, perhaps you've reconsidered?...Don't you want a drop of wine?

YOUNG MAN: No, thank you. Thanks, but I'll stick with the *rakija*.

MARIJA RIGO: Well, then, at least help yourself to a bit more. (*Fills his glass.*) Don't be embarrassed, son...And don't be angry with me! I'll go make coffee. You two continue your conversation in the meantime...you see, Emil, it's not so easy after all. The way I agonized over that cork!

EMIL (*holding the bottle and trying to use the corkscrew on it*): We'll begin with one incident, with the narration of a strange story from our captivity...

YOUNG MAN: Should I try my luck with that thing?...Maybe it would be better if you'd just push the cork in.

EMIL: Oh, no, no...I'll wrestle with it a bit more...I have, to wit, asserted, and I maintain this now as well and will continue to claim this till the end of my days, that both of us had watch duty that night, standing there next to each other—and up to that point our memories agree. Then we surrendered to the Russian patrol when I raised my handkerchief on a stick in the dawn's early light. I waved it around...Now pay attention. In his version it took place in the evening, and not at sunrise, and he was the one waving the handkerchief or rather the puttees we had tied onto the stick...So there are two completely different versions of the same story, not similar in the least. And so we go on down the list: by my lights, two Kirghiz soldiers approached us from the left and right, with submachine guns; in his opinion it was two huge blond Russians, one in front of us and one from behind, which is totally improbable since that would mean that the Russians were behind us, and these guys supposedly had rifles and fixed bayonets. You see, this story could prove most instructive, particularly in light of our previous...hm...how should I characterize it...our little difference of opinion earlier. In regard to your childhood memories, connected with my ring...

YOUNG MAN: But this memory of your ring is lodged in me. Quite unshakeably. And I could...

EMIL (*interrupting him rather brusquely*): For God's sake, do you really doubt the fact that our reminiscences, to be specific, that the reminiscences about which we've already been speaking, that our two memories are completely different creatures? Do you really doubt that the two differing memories are still as firm and irrefutable as ever after twenty years...All the common elements are present, in both of the variants, I mean: the white kerchief, that is to say, my handkerchief; and his puttees. And naturally for the sake of objectivity you have to take the word "white" in the most flexible sense, since these were, if you'll excuse the term, to be precise, skanky army rags, if there was anything there at all, if everything in both the one variant and the other wasn't just a run-of-the-mill fata morgana, horror, uncertainty, winter, hunger, dream, hallu-

cination or who knows what...(*Pours himself a glass of wine.*) You see, I didn't doubt it for a single moment. You see! Not for a single instant did I doubt his, that is to say, Oskar's, sincerity, or his, shall we say, integrity. Nor his intellect, either. No, my dear man, not for a minute. Because the long years of imprisonment, as well as the prior stretch in the army, demonstrated that Oskar was a decent man, a communist, or if you will a mega-comrade, a man of the real world and thus completely level-headed in every sense. What I mean to say is: a man impervious to flights of fancy. But see here—he did, in this rather delicate moment, as the both of us—as probably the sole communists in the entire unit—what am I saying, in the whole corps—when he and I had decided to give ourselves up to the Red Army, for we had grasped the fact that the just cause of communism lay on the other side...OK, what I mean to say is: he, at this most dicey of times, when our lives hung in the balance, when human lives were just hanging there by a thread, as an abyss of uncertainty gaped in front of us, as... Did you say something?

YOUNG MAN (*absent-mindedly*): No, no, no. Sorry. It's nothing...I was just going to...

EMIL: Now where did I leave off?...Ah yes. I did not doubt the reputable nature of Comrade Oskar for a second, nor did he—I am quite convinced of this—have any doubts about mine, either, that is to say, about my variation...And do you know what conclusion we ultimately reached, how we cut this Gordian knot, unravelled this tangled ball of truths? Rather elegantly...We simply accepted both variants as correct. What do you think of that?

YOUNG MAN (*shrugs his shoulders*): Well, how should I say this... Maybe, uh, I don't know. Maybe one should have discarded them both on the grounds that they were untruthful and imprecise variants...The differences weren't so great...

EMIL: Now I've got you where I want you. That is actually exactly how we handled it. We rejected both versions as inexact and untruthful. Now what do you say to that?

YOUNG MAN: I understand. At the same time you did—

EMIL: Of course. But this is still pretty much one and the same dialectical truth, when you look into it more closely. We accepted both variants, both reminiscences, as exact, and therefore as truthful—and simultaneously rejected them as inexact and untrue. So there you go. This is where the human sense of logic ceases to be of assistance to us, thanks to this strange mechanism...Look here, dear comrade—what are memories, anyway? (*Exhales a puff of cigarette smoke.*)...Air. Vapor. Null set.

Silence ensues.

MARIJA RIGO (*off*): Emil! Emil, put a record on for Andi at least. Andi, if you'll excuse me, I have to clear the dishes away now. This afternoon we have to go to a meeting, and because we have nothing to eat off of tomorrow...since we don't have any other plates that are clean...

Mrs. Rigo appears in the doorway with a tray and a washcloth in her hand.

MARIJA RIGO: Emil, I don't know if you remember, but Andi had a dog, a St. Bernard...

YOUNG MAN: Mrs. Rigo, it was a German shepherd mix. His name was Dingo.

EMIL: There you go! Look at that. I was in the process of telling Comrade Sam here the story about Oskar...You know, the one about how we were captured...And now you come along with this business about a St. Bernard...If you don't mind...Let us attempt to determine what type of dog it was. The comrade here says it was a German shepherd mix, while you maintain...you claim...

MARIJA RIGO: For heaven's sake, Andi, I am quite sure it was a St. Bernard...Good Lord, child, can't you distinguish between a half-German shepherd and a St. Bernard? I admit it: the fault is mine. You simply had a lousy teacher. A teacher who failed to impart to you the ability to tell a German shepherd—or rather, a half-German shepherd, whatever!—from a St. Bernard.

YOUNG MAN: But, for pete's sake, Mrs. Rigo—

MARIJA RIGO: No, no. What's true, is true. You simply had a bad teacher. For I could have taught you that much...

YOUNG MAN: But—

EMIL: You see? A splendid example, if I do say so myself....An object lesson. An object lesson in the ways memory can deceive a person...Who should be believed? Mrs. Rigo, the school-teacher, who maintains that the dog was a St. Bernard, and who advances this view with no hesitation, and with no stake in the matter. Or her pupil, the owner of said dog, who claims it was an Alsatian...Insofar as there is no factual error here, no garden-variety *lapsus*...

MARIJA RIGO: Are you at all capable of giving us, Andi, a description of your dog? How old were you then, anyway? Hold it—you're the same age as Otto. No—as Anton!...At that time you would've been seven or eight, eh? Is that right? So what did your dog look like?

YOUNG MAN: A mutt. His ears had little folds in them at the top where they stuck up.

MARIJA RIGO: For crying out loud, Andi, what are you saying? He had—and there is zero doubt about this—dark-brown ears. Long and droopy.

The young man is leaning over, with his head in his hands.

MARIJA RIGO: Fine, fine. I don't want to vex you any longer. We must be talking about different dogs. I mean, you must have had two dogs. One was a St. Bernard—

YOUNG MAN: —No, Mrs. Rigo, I had only one dog, and that was Dingo—

MARIJA RIGO: —So then—

EMIL: —Then you have to come to some sort of agreement. Of the type that Oskar and I reached. To a coordination of memories: this dog was a German shepherd, er, ok, a half-German shepherd, and it was simultaneously a St. Bernard. That means that, on the one hand, he had large, dark, droopy ears, and on the other hand he was possessed of pointy ears with little folds in them. Like a German shepherd. And here is the paradox, shall we say the dialectical paradox: this dog was neither a

German shepherd nor a St. Bernard...And thus, in this alternative variant, it all cancels out. Neu-tra-lized. Plus and minus—do each other in. That's how it is with memories, comrade. Air, vapor, smoke, nada!

MARIJA RIGO: But Emile, we've gotten carried away with this and we're not letting Andi get a word in edgewise...Tell us something about yourself, Andi. I've not actually heard anything in particular about you or your family. About how you make your living...I'm interested in all of it. A teacher is, whether you children like it or not, a teacher is a mother to you for your whole life. At least I feel that way, with regard to my students past and present, no difference...

YOUNG MAN: You know yourself, Mrs. Rigo, that I wouldn't know where to start. I don't at all think that I am capable of saying anything unusual or exceptionally intriguing about myself. Actually I just came here to see you, both of you, my friends, you and Mr. Rigo...

MARIJA RIGO: Say, you never finished that story you had started before Emil got home...That coffee must be ready. Please be patient and wait here a bit longer with Emil. I'll be right back and then I won't keep interrupting you all the time... (*Goes out. Off.*) Emil, you neglected to ask Andi if he likes classical music. Put something else on for him. Maybe the boy likes modern music...Down underneath are the records that Otto brought...

EMIL (*rummaging around in the records*): Where'd you put them, Marusja?

YOUNG MAN: Don't go to any trouble because of me. I like this music just fine.

EMIL: Geez, this is such a pain. (*Screaming.*) Marusja! Where the hell did they get to? Are they the ones still wrapped up in packing paper?

MARIJA RIGO (*off*): Just keep looking, Emil. Lord knows they must be there somewhere. They were there this morning when I was cleaning up that hutch.

EMIL (*confidentially*): If she redded up around here this morning, then she definitely misplaced them. Ah, I'll put on something that will really interest you. (*Puts on an album of Russian music.*)

Wartime memories...You know, this reminds me of those tough times of mine during the war...Russia. Siberia. The Volga. Stalingrad. You know what horror that was! That whole damned war. And there we were, I mean, really, crawling around, hungry, thirsty, half-naked, forty degrees below zero...That was such cold, you know. It was so cold, dear comrade, that human faeces would freeze before it—and taking a piss was...like death. Like suicide. And now, you see, when I hear this music...You know, now it all gets transformed into something refined. Because nowadays all that stuff is just a barefaced lie. All those memories have gone up in smoke. Turned to...naught.

Mrs. Rigo comes in bearing coffee.

MARIJA RIGO: Andi, my boy, you'll have to excuse Emil for a bit. While we drink this coffee, he has to go shave for a bit. I already mentioned that we have to—(*Glances at her watch.*)

The young man makes gestures that indicates he would like to leave.

MARIJA RIGO: Oh, no you don't! (*Lays a hand on the young man's shoulder and pushes him gently back into his seat.*) By no means...We'll stay put till the last possible moment. And you wouldn't want to leave before telling me, your dear old teacher, everything there is to tell...

EMIL: If you'll excuse me for one minute. It's really fast with this electric razor. Just help yourself to some coffee and sit there quietly...Marusja, please see about those records, will you?

YOUNG MAN: But, seriously, I think I've already kept you too long...Perhaps I'll come back some other time...

MARIJA RIGO: What do you mean, perhaps? You'll come back tomorrow morning, or maybe even tonight. Emil? (*Emil's electric razor is audible.*) Approximately when does this meeting of ours end?

EMIL (*off*): Did you say something?

MARIJA RIGO: This meeting of ours—when will it be over?

EMIL (*off*): God only knows...It could last right up till twelve.

MARIJA RIGO: Okay. Then at all events you'll come back tomorrow morning...We'll have some nice coffee and...

YOUNG MAN: But I'm leaving town tonight.

MARIJA RIGO: Heaven forbid, Andi! Why the rush?

YOUNG MAN: I have to go, Mrs. Rigo. This was just a brief little pilgrimage.

MARIJA RIGO: Well, okay, Andi. But what are your impressions? Did you find some of what you were looking for? Twenty years...Oh, Lord, that's a considerable...Whenever I think back...It's as if I had you right before my eyes, you and that St. Bernard, walking on the river bank...

YOUNG MAN: I told you. I found some people, but, do you know what?...Do you know, Mrs. Rigo, what I did not find? The landscape is what I was unable find. I said to myself: what is twenty years for a tree, for a river, for a forest? What is twenty years in the life of an oak? And I walk out to that place where I once knew every tree, every bush and flower—and I can't locate any of them...The trees have been felled, or the water has undercut them and carried them off, or they've been bowled over by lightning. The course of the river has shifted over those twenty years; it's gotten new banks now. It is eroding, changing. And nothing, not a thing, remains of what I had expected to find.

MARIJA RIGO: God forbid, Andi, but that's exactly what Emil was talking about: false memories. How is it possible...

YOUNG MAN: No, Mrs. Rigo, I know for a fact that outside the village, there by the river, there were two large, robust beech trees growing next to the dike.

MARIJA RIGO: What beech trees, Andi? I don't remember there ever being any beech trees on the river in the vicinity of our village...As far as I recall, there was only level land there, as flat as the palm of your hand, all the way over to the township boundary where the count's estate picks up.

YOUNG MAN: But I carved my name into one of those beeches... Deep down into the core of the tree. My name, so that one day, when I came back, I could find it again...And now nothing of it remains...No evidence or testimony is extant.

MARIJA RIGO: You were going to, to tell me, I believe, something about little Julija. What she looked like...Emil, Emil, did you

know that Andi was head-over-heels in love with that little Julija Szabo? Can you hear me, Emil?

EMIL (*off*): Did you say something?

MARIJA RIGO: I was saying that our Andi here was in love with little Julija Szabo...The one whose father was a village policeman during the war. Do you remember?

EMIL (*off*): Hmm.

YOUNG MAN: Yes, that's where I stopped: Uncle Horvat said: "Look here, it's not so easy to forget bygone loves...and the first cut is the deepest...And he told me: you've found your Julija here in the same place you left her...In that first house there... the new one."

MARIJA RIGO: Yes, I know. They built a new house, she and her husband.

YOUNG MAN: I was all excited, and I went and asked a peasant woman: "Excuse me, but does Julija Popov live here? Her maiden name was Julija Szabo." "Yes," she answered. "Can I speak to her?" I inquired. "What is it you want with her?" "Well," I said "I just need to..." "Well, that's me," she says.

MARIJA RIGO: "Emil, can you tell what a beautiful story Andi is telling? He met his first true love again, Julija, and he didn't recognize her. He was dumbfounded. Caught off guard."

EMIL (*off. The hum of the electric razor stops*): I can't hear you. I urge you to let me know if there's something you need to say to me. I keep getting the feeling you're talking to me...

MARIJA RIGO: I was saying that you ought to hear the way Andi's story went, about meeting up with that little Julija Szabo again...

EMIL (*off. Speaking over the hum of the electric shaver*): Keep on doing what you're doing. I'll be there in a jif.

YOUNG MAN: I'll admit that I blanched. My God, had she ever grown ugly.

MARIJA RIGO: Ugly? You had that impression too?

YOUNG MAN: She offered me her hand, firm, large, chapped—almost like a man's. She said, "Hi, Andi. How are you?" "Fine," I said. "How did you recognize me?" "No big deal," she said. "And did you recognize me?" I lied and said, "Yes. I simply

wasn't sure it was really you and I wanted to check..." And I had expected to find—just imagine how loco I must've been—I'd expected to find the same girl. With the same pouty little nose and blonde hair, and those green eyes.

MARIJA RIGO: Really, now, Andi. You're exaggerating. You always were inclined to flights of fancy, just like your late father. Forgive me for having to say this, but you are exaggerating a bit. Julija Szabo was never blonde and she didn't have green eyes, and she had no pouty little nose.

YOUNG MAN: You mean to say...

MARIJA RIGO: Emil, Emil, come hear this. It's quite intriguing... Emil...

Pause. The only sound is the buzzing of the shaver.

MARIJA RIGO: Emil, holy smokes. How long are you going to keep shaving?...*(Jumpy.)* Emil—maybe you're trimming the hairs in your ears now? Emil...

EMIL *(off. He has turned off the electric apparatus)*: Were you saying something?

MARIJA RIGO: Please tell me if you remember a girl named Julija Szabo.

Emil comes in, drying his face with a towel.

EMIL: But of course...The little black-haired girl with the great big black eyes...

MARIJA RIGO *(gives the young man a hand signal urging him to be quiet)*: But we can't seem to recall what kind of nose she had....

EMIL: Her nose...Wait, let me think back *(Closes his eyes.)*...Ah, well, I remember her daddy's nose. Crooked, almost like a hook...And I remember her well. In the upper school I taught her two or three times.

MARIJA RIGO: Oh, Andi, Andi, you have such an imagination. Like a Romantic poet. Did you turn into a poet somewhere along the way?...But Emil, get this: he's saying to me: "Think, Mrs. Rigo! The short blonde girl. Just think back: blonde and—" What else did you say?

YOUNG MAN: I said: with green eyes.

MARIJA RIGO: Just listen to that: with green eyes and a little turned-up nose. He has obviously gotten mixed up...He had another girl in mind...Maybe you were thinking of—

The young man stands up and walks over to the window. Holding the curtains to one side, he looks out.

YOUNG MAN: No, Mrs. Rigo, no. You're wrong. Julija was blonde, and she had green eyes and a pug nose...The dog was an German shepherd mix...At the river's edge, next to the dike, there were two oak trees. I used to climb them, and one of them has a branch where I carved my name with a knife twenty years ago...Mr. Rigo did have a mustache, a big black one that he used to trim, and on the middle finger of his right hand he wore a signet ring with which he thumped students on the head...You don't mean to say, do you, Mrs. Rigo, that my father didn't exist either? Old drunken Eduard Sam...The same Sam who brought you wild eggplant in his greasy old hat?

MARIJA RIGO: Oh, Andi, for God's sake, we aren't children here. You don't want to get angry, do you, because memory is letting us down—all of us? Especially us old folks? Because our recollections do not match down to the last detail? Wasn't I the one who said—and Emil is my witness—that one day, during the war, your father brought me eggplant in his hat and as he left he said to me: "Do you know, Mrs. Rigo, what these eggplants need now?"

EMIL: A good white wine like a *Gewürztraminer*.

The young man spins around abruptly.

YOUNG MAN: That means, Mr. Rigo, that you DO actually remember my father!...And yes, that's what he said, a good *Gewürztraminer*.

EMIL (*pours himself a drink*): I remember it—or, more precisely, I have been reminded of it by Marusja's story about Mr...What was his name anyway?

YOUNG MAN: Eduard. Eduard Sam.

EMIL: Well, I have remembered the story of your father, Mr. Sam, and those famous eggplants...You know, I've told Marusja that in the

first year that I was a POW we got one potato per day to eat, and sometimes it was even raw, you know...Those were nasty times. And one day, instead of a potato, you know what I got stuck with? You'll never guess. I got—no idea why or how—I got a sugar beet. Can you, my friend, can you fathom the significance of that for a half-dead prisoner? For a freezing, hungry POW, worn down by work? Do you know what a sugar beet would mean to him so to speak? And do you know what I did with that sugar beet? I shared it with the comrades in my party cell...

YOUNG MAN: And what would you do now if some eyewitness showed up...say...some...some comrade from your captivity who claimed that...first of all, it wasn't a sugar beet but a cauliflower. And, second, it was he, not you, who got this beet, that is, this cauliflower. Third—well, let's stop there: it wasn't a sugar beet but rather a cauliflower and it was actually distributed to you, but you didn't really share it with the comrades of your party cell, because at this time there was no...Bear with me. I'm just hypothesizing. This is just a hypothesis, the mechanism of memory. No cell of that type existed there then...And you ate that cauliflower all alone, in secret, as it were, in one single ravenous gulp.

EMIL: Please! I'd like to...

YOUNG MAN: I'm not finished yet...And this carrot, or, as the case may be, this sugar beet or cauliflower or whatever it was, did not fall into your hands by magic. Rather (if you'll allow me to say—and don't you get mad!) it was payment, a wee little compensation for minor services rendered to those who were guarding you.

EMIL (*with considered coldness*): That would mean, to get to the core of this hypothesis, that a certain Mr. NN is accusing me of being a quisling, to use the slang term for it. Well, if it interests you to know: I would knock the teeth straight out of Mr. NN's head, whoever he was. Because this would no longer be a matter of a straightforward mechanism of memory, of a minor deviation, a slight deformation—but this would be a lie, a great shameless tendentious humiliating lie...Because who, really, could be so insolent, or let me put it—so—

Sputtering and fuming, he cannot find the right words.

MARIJA RIGO: Emil, good heavens! Can't you two find some topic more appropriate than that one, over and over? My God, you men can't do anything but talk politics and argue...Always the same thing: war, POW camps, the Russians, the Germans, the Americans, these folks, those folks... And you, Andi, are just adding fuel to the fire. Talk about more edifying things, such as music, or painting, or...

YOUNG MAN: Before we go on, I have to ask you to explain to Mrs. Rigo that you aren't angry. That this is just one of those male conversations that involves a lot of heat and fire. Forgive me, Mrs. Rigo, but women always think these are altercations, although it's mostly just a matter of passionately putting forth one's point of view, one's ideas...I think Comrade Rigo will agree with me on that...

EMIL: Certainly, certainly...(Stands up and holds out his cigarette case.) Maybe you'd like to try one of these?

YOUNG MAN: No, thank you...I'll stick with my own...But let's go on. If you have a bit more time...

EMIL (*looks at his watch*): Yeah, yeah, there's still time...So, then. As I was saying, with this mechanism of memory....

YOUNG MAN: You said you had this carrot.

EMIL: Sugar beet.

YOUNG MAN: Fine. Whatever. Sugar beet. You shared this sugar beet with the comrades in your cell.

EMIL: That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.

YOUNG MAN: Are you also sticking to the fact that it was a sugar beet and not a cauliflower or even a completely ordinary potato that appeared to you as a carrot?

MARIJA RIGO: Your statements are starting to sound more and more like a trial. Really you could try to come up with something more reasonable to discuss, if it's a discussion you have to have. Emil, tell Andi, please, how they put you to the test when you came home from being a POW. That was as treacherous as it was obvious...So, here's Emil, coming home from captivity...

EMIL: And they present me, the POW, all skin and bones, with two suits of clothes. A jacket, trousers, shirt, and tie. Two complete suits, I mean...Be patient, please. You'll see in a moment. They spread these out before me, two nearly identical suits, relief assistance from the Red Cross. And the only difference was in the ties: one suit came with a blue tie, and the other came with a red one...

YOUNG MAN: And naturally you chose the one with the red tie.

EMIL: Of course. Without hesitation. Because it was obvious to me that this was some type of petty provocation, or, to be more precise—

YOUNG MAN: But why did they have to put you—of all people—to the test? How do you interpret that?

MARIJA RIGO: Andi, you know...You know that Emil has always...

EMIL: Please, let's not talk about that. It wasn't only I who was subjected to a little test like that. To a sort of, how should I put it, political plebiscite. All combat veterans and former POWs were tested in the same way.

MARIJA RIGO (*trying to join the conversation*): Those were very strange days...Do you remember, Emil?

YOUNG MAN: So it was then that you joined...

EMIL: Not then, my friend. It was back in Russia, right at the very beginning. It was clear to me then that communism was the only possible mode of life...At the time of the test I donned that red tie only as a symbol, for surely you don't believe...

MARIJA RIGO: Poor Emil—he came home all in rags.

YOUNG MAN: Naturally I wasn't thinking that you could freely pick your colors in the POW camp. Far from it...But can you remember, by means of the most straightforward mechanism of memory, what kind of ties you wore before and during the war, Comrade Emil?

EMIL: Really, man, you are asking bizarre questions. What am I supposed to make of this?

MARIJA RIGO: Andi, let's drop this line of conversation. It'd be better to have another glass of *rakija* and tell us something about yourself...You haven't told us anything substantial...You're keeping yourself so mysterious...Emil, I swear, it's all

your fault...Andi, do you remember how the children brought loaves of bread to you in school one time? Do you remember? My God, what times those were...

YOUNG MAN: Yes, I remember, Mrs. Rigo...You told us we had to stay after the lessons and you called me up to the front of the class...There I stood at the lectern and my classmates filed past, each one of them putting a piece of bread into my arms...I held my arms like this, the way you carry firewood...I collected it all...and then I ran home. That was at the time they first picked up my father...(Turning abruptly to Emil.) Do you still claim, Comrade Emil, that the mechanism of memory can deceive?

EMIL: I continue to assert that it is deceptive. I will not back down on that. Because there are numerous examples that demonstrate...

YOUNG MAN: Then why do I remember Mr. Rigo so well, for instance. Tall, dark hair, with a trimmed moustache, and a ring on the middle finger of his right hand...

MARIJA RIGO: That much is quite clear, Andi...Students remember their teachers, and when a teacher is as strict as Emil...

EMIL: Marusja, you don't really think—and you, as a party member—that I...How did you two put it?

MARIJA RIGO: Thumped the children's heads...

EMIL: That I used my signet ring to give those children thumps on their heads...

MARIJA RIGO: For heaven's sake, Emil, maybe nonetheless you sometimes...After all, I know how jumpy you can get...

EMIL: Nonetheless, this is fantastical...It almost defies comprehension.

YOUNG MAN: You wore a dark tie. It might've even been a black one...

MARIJA RIGO: Forgive me for interrupting, Andi, but do you still remember how one time I gave you Anton's shoes and how you had to slit them open in the back because they were too little for you? You had big old feet, even then...Yes, yes, just like my Otto... That little brunette, your Julija, she really stopped your clock...

YOUNG MAN: I do remember that, Mrs. Rigo. I can recall it all. Julija had long blond braids—

MARIJA RIGO: Listen to him, Emil! Why, really! For him she's blonde. A blonde!

Emil shakes his head. He stretches out his arms.

YOUNG MAN: —and little freckles all over her face and she really filled my sails...You gave me Anton's old shoes and said: If they're too small for you, make a little cut in the back part; that's still better than going barefoot this winter...And I remember that you told all the students—but I didn't find this out till later—about the bread, that you told them that everyone should bring one piece for me, because otherwise that hapless Sam family is going to die of hunger and cold...And surely you also said—I didn't hear of this, but surely...

MARIJA RIGO: Don't exaggerate now, Andi...

YOUNG MAN: You certainly must have said: otherwise those unfortunates are going to die. And then, in addition: in the case of the old alcoholic, this Mr. Sam, that might not be such a bad thing...

MARIJA RIGO: You are exaggerating, Andi! Believe me—this is hyperbole. I respected your father as a learned man. And that episode with the eggplant made him seem more likeable, although in all honesty I felt sorry for the rest of you. Especially for your mother.

YOUNG MAN: And I also know the way you comforted my mother. You said to her: Mrs. Sam, you just take care of those kids. That crazy man of yours—let him go where he will...You were standing next to my mom and me, and my father lay there on the floor in front of us, beaten half to death...And Mr. Rigo was wearing a dark suit.

EMIL: You really have a rich fantasy life...I scarcely knew your father. We never even exchanged greetings. I don't know...

YOUNG MAN: Your husband, Mr. Rigo—had a black suit on and some sort of band around his arm.

EMIL (*nervous*): Aha, that's what you're getting at...Yes! For a time—when was that Marusja?—probably right before the war broke out, there was a time, a short time, that is, when I was in the militia.

YOUNG MAN: A band on his sleeve, and a black tie.

EMIL: Your memories, I must say, represent pure Daltonism. For you, the girl Julija Szabo is blond and has green eyes and, let's say too that you consider that gray or blue tie to be black.

MARIJA RIGO: Really, Andreas, I don't understand what you're talking about. Emil hasn't worn a black tie in his whole life... On the contrary, he only ever wore light colored ties...

YOUNG MAN: And red ones, of course.

EMIL: Yes, and red ones. And I still wear them! If you care to know, I, I mean we, are loyal and dedicated to this government, because, comrade, my wife and I, my children—we've been through a lot...And now you come along with these infantile memories and you think they represent the pinnacle of suffering and temptation. I went through Soviet captivity and before that I was on the Eastern Front!

MARIJA RIGO: You two are talking shop again, Emil...And you'll be bickering again soon because of this damned political stuff...I'm afraid, Andi, that you won't be able to solve all these big issues today, if you were hoping to run the table.

YOUNG MAN: Forgive me for keeping you so long. I must really apologize, Mrs. Rigo...but I so wanted to know what you were up to, you and your husband, and all the others from the old days...

MARIJA RIGO: Emil, you have to start getting ready. Andi will excuse you for a moment so you can get dressed. You can chat a bit more on the way. But, please, I urge you, drop this confounded political talk.

EMIL (*coldly*): If you'll excuse us. I have to finish getting ready. Then we can all head out together...Ah, young comrade, you see how it is with memories. I'm telling you: vapor (*Walking away*)...smoke, fog, dream, nothing.

MARIJA RIGO: I'm truly quite sorry, Andi, that you must go back tomorrow. And you didn't tell us anything about yourself. As God is my witness, I wish I knew what you do nowadays, and where you live...You didn't share with me a single coherent thing about yourself...I remember, Andi. How could I not remember? I too have a strange nostalgia for the village,

for our village, where all of us together, you and your people, everybody collectively, lived through those difficult years. And who would think that twenty years have passed since then...Lord knows we're all getting old. (*Genuinely moved.*) You don't know, Andi, what we all had to endure. Not only Emil, but also your friends. Anton and Otto, I mean. All of us. We repented profoundly, my child, for all the things with which you are reproaching Emil. You see, Otto became an officer. You know what a feel he had for music...Remember how he's played piano since he was a child? And Anton? You know our Anton has fled abroad...Oh, I didn't tell you that. We don't mention it. Instead we say: "Our Anton is studying in..." He's a grown man. Why should we tear our hair out over him?... But poor Emil really hit the ceiling about it...(*She hears Emil's steps. He stops and opens the blinds. She continues speaking, in a different tone of voice.*) Emil, put an undershirt on. It's going to be chilly out. And take the umbrella...Emil, I think it's going to rain.

YOUNG MAN (*gets to his feet*): Yes, Mrs. Rigo, I thought you were going to say to me, "Ah, you are that sweet little Andreas Sam," but you said "That little scallawag, with his pet dog..."

MARIJA RIGO: With the St. Bernard.

YOUNG MAN: Well, as you say, the little loser with his St. Bernard. But believe me, Mrs. Rigo, I swear to you that it was an ordinary half-German-shepherd. But that doesn't matter now. This little no-goodnik, who used to sneak off to the shed with Julija Szabo...

MARIJA RIGO: Now, look...(*Amiably.*) You don't mean to deny that you were the village's little troublemaker...You were more of a hoodlum than any of the other children in the village... Emil, if you only knew what a troublemaker he was, and now it bothers him when his dear old teacher says it to his face...Emil, we're going to be late. What the hell are you doing in there? Emil...(*To Andi, confidentially.*) I'll bet he's in the pantry taking a little nip of something. (*Turns away and speaks softly so that Emil doesn't hear her.*) I have to confess, Andi, the poor man started drinking when our older son, Anton, your school-

NIGHT AND FOG

mate, left the country...But you see, out of respect for me, he only has a glass or two when I'm there, and only when there's company. Emil! We're going to be late!

YOUNG MAN: So this is goodbye, Mrs. Rigo. Farewell. And forgive me for staying so long.

MARIJA RIGO: Goodness, Andi, you haven't given us any proper information about yourself? At least tell me....

YOUNG MAN: Well, when I undertook this little pilgrimage, I was telling myself...Come on, let's visit our dear old teacher. C'mon, let's see what has become of my friends, of Béla Horvat, Julija, and the rest of them. I said to myself: people change, landscapes stay the same...And you see, Mrs. Rigo, I didn't find any of it...I didn't even find the trees, not even the two oaks where I had carved my name...

Emil enters, tipsy and alarmed-looking, suddenly showing his age. He carries an umbrella. He is hunched over a bit, and his voice is tired.

EMIL (*with honesty and fatigue*): I'm telling you, young man, that's the way it goes with memories: smoke, vapor, dream, fog, nothingness.

They all go out together. Emil is still saying something, but we cannot hear what it is.

Lights fade to black.

THE END

THE PARROT



CHARACTERS

A YOUNG MAN

MRS. SMERDEL

ANTON



The stairwell of an apartment building. Mrs. Smerdel is coming home. She stops before her door, puffing hard, and we can tell that she is already at an age when traipsing up to the second or third floor is a significant exertion for her. In front of the door to her apartment (bearing the brass nameplate SMERDEL) she extracts a key-ring from her pocket and opens the lock with smooth, deft motions. (Naturally she is wearing gloves, because the Smerdels belong to the so-called middle class: the apartment and her wardrobe also testify to this fact through their mixture of tastelessness and pretense.) So she turns the key in the lock, two revolutions. Oh, look, she forgot to cut off the light when she left! Without removing her coat, and with no sign of nervousness (because, really, what is there to fear here, apart from a slightly elevated electric bill?), she enters the foyer and then the front room of the apartment. Suddenly she recoils, aghast.

YOUNG MAN (*dispersing his cigarette smoke with his hand, like a child whom one has caught smoking*): I didn't hear you come in.

Mrs. Smerdel says nothing, paralyzed with fear. The young man, confused and surprised, is standing in front of an open cabinet, in a room in which he has apparently been lingering for some time.

YOUNG MAN: As I said, I really didn't hear you come in.

Mrs. Smerdel remains silent. She is puzzled.

YOUNG MAN: Why aren't you at the theater? (*Looks at his watch.*)
It's only 9. Or maybe my watch is wrong. (*Holds it up to his*

ear.) It's ticking. A Swiss watch. Sixteen rubies...Really, how is it that you aren't at the theater?

Mrs. Smerdel is still saying nothing. She is trembling.

YOUNG MAN: *La Traviata*, right? You had a ticket to *La Traviata*. (Pause.) You don't plan on keeping mum like this the entire time, do you, Mrs. Smerdel? For God's sake! Take your coat off. I cannot stand to see someone in a warm room dressed as if they were outside in the cold of winter. (Sternly.) I am talking to you, Mrs. Smerdel! Take off that preposterous coat immediately!

MRS. SMERDEL (stuttering): Who—are—you?

YOUNG MAN: Now, that's better...Just take that coat off, nice and easy.

He stands up all the way. Up to this point he's been resting on his knees in front of a safe; in his left hand he holds a jewel box, and he's still holding it when he turns his attention to Mrs. Smerdel. It's only when he's on his feet that he realizes it's pointless to keep holding onto it, so he sets it on the floor. It's as if he has forgotten that he has stood up, because he intends to help Mrs. Smerdel out of her coat.

YOUNG MAN (pointing to the jewel box): Nothing to write home about...Two or three old brooches, bracelets. Are they even genuine? I have the impression that all this is fake.

MRS. SMERDEL: Who—are—you?

YOUNG MAN (making fun of her): Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?...Or am I mistaken? Maybe you said nothing? Maybe you didn't ask me anything? Boy, am I stupid. It's your parrot...But why have you taught your parrot to ask a question as idiotic and, it must be said, as impolite as "Who are you? Who are you?" It's the job of the police, my dear Mrs. Smerdel, to ask the dumb, unpleasant questions...Have I for instance asked you who you are? Am I not for example addressing you by your venerable last name? Well? What? Did my parrot ask, for instance, who you are? (Turns to the nonexistent parrot on his shoulder.) Tell me, Bubi, have we been asking Mrs. Smerdel dumb questions? (Answers himself in the voice of a parrot.)

No-no! (*In his own voice.*) See there? Or did we say something offensive? (*Parrot.*) No-no. (*In his own voice.*) Didn't we say she should take off her coat and make herself at home? (*Parrot.*) We did—We did. (*In his own voice.*) So you see?...(*Sternly.*) Well then, take that coat off and stop asking silly questions!

Mrs. Smerdel attempts to suppress her quaking. She removes her coat and lays it across her arm.

YOUNG MAN: Don't just stand there with that ridiculous coat of yours. Schlepp it over to the usual place!...Or do you always do this?...When you take off your coat, I mean?

MRS. SMERDEL (*suddenly feeling brave*): So can I...hang it up...in the armoire?

YOUNG MAN: Not in the wardrobe, Mrs. Smerdel. There are only winter things in the wardrobe. This coat hangs on the clothes rack in the foyer. On the clothes rack...(*Emphatically.*) Next to the telephone...

MRS. SMERDEL: Right...

She sidles away, without taking her eyes off the young man.

MRS. SMERDEL: On the clothes rack, then...?

YOUNG MAN: Get a move on, would you?...You should be ashamed of yourself, Mrs. Smerdel...You could be my mother...Yes, yes, my mother...And aren't you thinking that I might order you to keep undressing now?

Mrs. Smerdel moves more quickly now, although she is still irresolute. The young man remains where he is. We can hear her opening a door.

YOUNG MAN (*somewhat louder*): And don't attempt to use the telephone...I mean, I am not forbidding you to do it, but you must know that the line has been cut. Just in case. Do you hear me? Don't try it...

Mrs. Smerdel appears in the doorway all of a sudden—indeed, so unexpectedly that the young man draws back. She seems altered, as though she had dumped her fear when she doffed her coat. At least temporarily.

MRS. SMERDEL: I assumed as much!

YOUNG MAN (*pointing at the little box*): Don't you have any better stuff?

MRS. SMERDEL: Give me that box and get out of here! My husband could...

YOUNG MAN (*to the parrot*): He has already mastered that, too. C'mon, Bubi, say it. (*As the parrot.*) My husband could come back at any time. My husband...(*In his own voice.*) That's enough, Bubi! Don't act like you've been wound up like a toy... Are you surprised to find that I've named him Bubi? I'll admit it's a little dumb. Bubi is a dog's name. But what are you gonna do? I did it for his sake. Bubi was my dog. When I was little, of course. Now I no longer like dogs: I only liked Bubi. That was long ago. It was back before the war, as people say. In memory of Bubi I gave my parrot his name.

MRS. SMERDEL: And now give me that box, and disappear. You and your Bubi.

YOUNG MAN (*shoving her away*): Look at that! I'm explaining to her about Bubi, and she just wants to kill me. You would be capable of offing a young fellow just because he is telling you about his memories...You are a real—I am speechless! But you know... For the murder of a young man you'd get the death penalty or life in prison. (*Wags a menacing finger at her.*) Uh-uh, Mrs. Smerdel. Would you kill a parrot on account of some shabby little box filled with costume jewelry? What would your husband say to that? Eh? Do you think he'd congratulate you for it? Definitely not! I'd bet my life on it. He wouldn't do it.

Mrs. Smerdel sits down on the couch towards which the young man had pushed her, and she gives the impression that her sense of composure had left her. Perhaps she is considering whether the young man might have escaped from a mental institution. With alarm in her eyes she watches him. She's ready for the worst.

YOUNG MAN: What did you say?

MRS. SMERDEL: N-n-nothing.

YOUNG MAN: What do you mean, nothing? You said something. My parrot whispered in my ear that you said something. (*Acts as if he's listening to something that the parrot is whispering in his ear.*)

So then, I'll tell you what it is. Yet again you asked who I am. And (*Listening to the parrot's whisper once more.*)...you inquired of the police whether a crazy man about thirty years of age had escaped from the asylum. You gave them a brief description of my appearance, like in a detective film. A young man around thirty; 1.7 meters tall (you hesitated a bit there); weight, about 75 kg; eyes...blue-green. Steel blue, as they say. But that's where you're wrong, Mrs. Smerdel. It's all radically untrue. Except the age. I think your numbers are right there. Around thirty. That flatters me. I'm actually thirty-three. Yes, yes. Jesus' age. That's how old he was when they crucified him, right? Thirty three. Like me...And now you'd like nothing more than to see me strung up...No, no. You haven't even thought of it before. Only just now, when I mentioned that I was Jesus' age. Previously it would have been enough for you if they had sentenced me to five or six years of prison, or simply shot me. That cuts down on the suffering, right? But when I said to you that I'd like to stay a little longer, that's when you hit upon the idea that hanging would be the only appropriate punishment. And now that I've introduced you to that accursed notion of crucifixion, you suddenly find it to be the only punishment worthy of me. Well, fine. I have nothing against it. But...

MRS. SMERDEL (*resolutely*): Who are you?...(*Stops, changes her tone.*)
What are you after here?

YOUNG MAN: Again!?...What do you think a stranger is looking for in someone else's apartment at this time of day? You tell me.

MRS. SMERDEL: You're a...(*Stops.*)

YOUNG MAN: What did you say?

MRS. SMERDEL: You're a thief!

YOUNG MAN: Oh, finally!. Thank God. That's right, ma'am, I'm a thief. Everything points in that direction...And what do you think it is that I'm looking for in someone else's apartment?

Mrs. Smerdel says nothing.

YOUNG MAN (*sternly*): Well, what?

MRS. SMERDEL (*stammers*): I...don't...know.

YOUNG MAN: You don't know? You don't know what a thief is after

at this time of night in a stranger's apartment? Unreal. (*To the parrot.*) In your opinion, Bubi, what is it that we're looking for in someone else's apartment while the owners are off listening to *Rigoletto*?...You don't know either? Fine, fine. You're a parrot, but I just can't get it through my head that Mrs. Smerdel doesn't know that. Think about it, Bubi. what would've transpired if the lady here had really stayed to hear *Rigoletto*...(*Listens carefully as the parrot corrects him.*) Pardon me, *La Traviata*. You're right, Bubi. Just imagine how much fun we'd've had! Can you imagine?

MRS. SMERDEL: My husband could show up any minute.

YOUNG MAN (*looking at the clock*): But that makes no sense at all.

You're saying he might return all of a sudden? That's not his habit. Your husband's playing poker now...or *chemin-de-fer*... Aha, now I get it. This is super, Bubi! He's jealous! Is that it, Mrs. Smerdel?

MRS. SMERDEL: What concern is it of yours?

YOUNG MAN: Would you look at that, Bubi! He's jealous. This is grand! He'll come home and find his wife with an unknown (and fairly attractive, why not?) young man. Super! And what would he do next? That really intrigues me. What would he do when he stumbled upon us in this situation...in an intimate conversation, as it were?

MRS. SMERDEL: What the hell do you want from me? You've already seen the jewelry.

She leaps up and rushes over to the bookcase, where she opens up a thick volume.

YOUNG MAN (*laughing*): Looking for something?

MRS. SMERDEL: You bandit! Thief! You took our...How the hell did you...

YOUNG MAN: How did I locate your money? Is that what you want to find out?

The young man crosses over to her, takes the book out of her hand and replaces it on the shelf, carefully, without letting Mrs. Smerdel out of his sight, for her desperation has reached its peak. In complete silence and despair she obeys him now.

YOUNG MAN: Thaaat's it. (*Grabs her roughly by the arm.*) And now be good and return to your seat. Or, if you're so inclined, make us some coffee. An excellent cup of coffee would hit the spot, wouldn't it, Bubi?

A disconsolate Mrs. Smerdel puts her head in her hands.

YOUNG MAN: It's not like it's all that disastrous. 200,000 dinars. A trifle, if you please. No need to despair over a lousy 200,000 dinars. To get all depressed.

MRS. SMERDEL: 250,000, if you really want to know.

YOUNG MAN: All the better. You know, I didn't count it. I was just shooting from the hip. Fifty thousand more or less is of no consequence.

MRS. SMERDEL: To you, perhaps.

YOUNG MAN: Did I say "of no consequence"? That just sort of slipped out. Sorry. I should actually be glad that I, as a complete surprise to me and without lifting a finger myself, rather just on the strength of a word from you, have become 50,000 dinars richer. It's like in poker. But, as you can see, I'm not gloating over that at all.

MRS. SMERDEL: No wonder.

YOUNG MAN: How's that?

MRS. SMERDEL: Nothing, nothing.

YOUNG MAN (*sternly*): I didn't catch that. Did you say: no wonder?

MRS. SMERDEL: I thought...

YOUNG MAN: I know. I know what you thought. That it's of no consequence to me whether there's 50,000 more or less there. That's what you wanted to say, right?

MRS. SMERDEL: Something like that.

YOUNG MAN: Ah, you see. But that's where you're wrong, Mrs. Smerdel. I'll clear this...(*Pulls up a chair and sits down facing her, as if they were conducting business.*)...clear this right up. I came here—

MRS. SMERDEL (*emboldened by his behavior*): —How did you get in here?

YOUNG MAN: Excuse me?

MRS. SMERDEL: I'm asking how you got in here.

YOUNG MAN: Right. So how did I get in here? I've completely forgotten. Bubi, how did we get in here? (*Strains to hear Bubi's answer.*) Ah, yes. I had almost forgotten. Fortunately Bubi reminded me of it. Bubi is extraordinarily handy, you see. He has a superb memory. He remembers everything. Everything that I forget. He says that we unlocked your door with a key. With a normal key, the way you do it. Isn't that right, Bubi? (*Serious again, stern.*) How else would I have made my way here, Mrs. Smerdel, other than by means of a key?

MRS. SMERDEL: But...

YOUNG MAN: Whatever do you mean, "but"! There is no "but"! Are you trying to say that you locked the door and turned the lock over twice with your key? Is that right? (*Doesn't allow her to respond*) And you would be certain that you'd turned the key twice and you'd checked everything, just in case. Then you stuck the key in your purse...Hey! (*Reaches into his pocket.*) Didn't I have it somewhere?...Hey, Bubi, maybe you swiped it...? (*Groping about nervously in his pockets, although we do not know if it's in jest or in earnest.*) I know for certain that I took it out and put it somewhere...

From his pocket he pulls: a handkerchief, a cigarette holder, pieces of hard candy, cigarette butts, a match, some change, and a crumpled 500-dinar bill that he carefully unfolds and smooths out; from the inside pocket of the coat he extracts a bundle of dinar bills, a wallet, some pornographic photos, and a pack of playing cards.

It's as if he had forgotten for a second that Mrs. Smerdel was even there. Now he is rummaging through the cigarette packs and everything he pulled from his pockets.

While he is oblivious to Mrs. Smerdel and has his back to her, she attempts to stand up. This happens while the young man is apparently completely wrapped up in his search and his monologue.

YOUNG MAN: Bubi, you have really turned out to be quite irresponsible. Please try to recall where the heck I put that key. You remember. We named it "the little golden key." And you have to admit, it truly was golden. A master key that fit all locks. Ka-ching! Gone are those massive keychains, all the fumbling

and schlepping around like in a detective show. I mean, get real: I'm no prison guard, dragging around a tremendous set of keys fastened to my belt like that. Get cracking and think of where it is! We inserted the key into the lock. That much I recall clearly. Then we opened the door up, and I pulled the key back out. I stuck it in my pocket and told you this: Bubi, something is going down tonight. Just like that. You replied: I bet that means there'll be a little something for me, too. Then I said—*(Abruptly.)*—oh, offer Mrs. Smerdel some candy.

Mrs. Smerdel, who had already gotten to her feet and was about to tip-toe surreptitiously out into the corridor, stops, uncertain if the sentence is directed at her or is simply part of the young man's rambling soliloquy. She halts in mid-motion, rolling her eyes, tense, afraid.

YOUNG MAN: Did you hear what I said to you? Offer Mrs. Smerdel a piece of candy...Bubi, you're getting less and less presentable every day. Or maybe you've gotten stingy? Good heavens! You're a miser! It makes you ill to have to offer Mrs. Smerdel a regular old bonbon. Uff, Bubi. That's not good. That's not nice of you at all.

Mrs. Smerdel hesitates. Then she risks it anyway. Haltingly, as if in slow motion, she lifts one foot and takes a painfully measured half-step.

YOUNG MAN: See that, Bubi? Mrs. Smerdel is mad at us. She's quite capable of leaving us if you're going to be this unfriendly to her...

Mrs. Smerdel stops.

YOUNG MAN: As far as I'm concerned, you can be a cheapskate, but I'm not. Here. *(Fishes a piece of candy out of the little heap of stuff from his pocket.)*...Don't know if it'll suit your fancy or not...Here you go, Mrs. Smerdel. *(Hands her the candy.)*

MRS. SMERDEL *(pretends she had been moving towards the young man and his candy)*: Thanks. *(Takes the bonbon and keeps it in her hand.)*

YOUNG MAN: You're most welcome. And I beg your pardon. You know keeps getting stingier and stingier.

MRS. SMERDEL (*conciliatory, with the candy in her hand*): It seems that way to me, too.

YOUNG MAN: It doesn't matter what it seems like. It's obvious.

MRS. SMERDEL (*conciliatory*): You know best.

YOUNG MAN: It's painfully clear. Let's take, for example...

MRS. SMERDEL: As you wish...

YOUNG MAN: The facts are there. There are plenty of them. Thus there is no room for doubt. He buys the absolute cheapest jewelry. (*Grabs hold of the jewelry box.*) Nothing but worthless junk...Aside from the bracelet. (*Holds it up.*)

MRS. SMERDEL (*crestfallen*): Twenty-four karat gold. From Turkey. A gift...from my parents. It's a valuable keepsake.

YOUNG MAN (*holds the armband out to her, with real or feigned generosity*): Forgive me. I didn't know. Here, take it. Just take it. I thought he had bought it for you...You said it was a keepsake?

MRS. SMERDEL (*puts on the armband*): Yes. From my parents.

YOUNG MAN (*stuffing everything he had pulled out back into his pockets*): Aha...But he is, as you can see, a cheapskate.

MRS. SMERDEL: I don't know. In days gone by, one might've considered him thrifty.

YOUNG MAN: Thrifty? No sign of that. He's a run-of-the-mill skin-flint. You've witnessed it yourself. Ten minutes ago I asked him to give you a piece of candy, and he pretended to be deaf... (*Furious.*) Why aren't you eating that bonbon?

MRS. SMERDEL: Oh, well...you know...as I was telling you...I don't care much for sweets.

YOUNG MAN (*yanking the piece of candy from her hand*): Why didn't you say so, for crying out loud? I scrimp and save and you put on airs about it. He loves candy. He is prepared to steal when there's candy at stake, yes, yes, to steal, and in the most brazen manner. And you...(Unwraps the piece of candy and pops it into his mouth.)...It's a thing with him, a complex. Have you heard of it before?

Mrs. Smerdel is silent.

YOUNG MAN: You see, I...he...has this mania about candy. About sweets in general. Maybe you read that thing in the paper,

about that guy, not far from here, who one day consumed an entire jar of pear preserves. He wolfed down so much that he got quite sick from it afterwards.

At that very moment Mrs. Smerdel discovers the open jar under the table.

YOUNG MAN (*chastened, or only apparently so—God only knows. And the author is uncertain*): Ah...Pardon me. How should I say this...I'm ashamed to admit that earlier he ate up an entire jar. (*To the parrot, sternly.*) You see, Bubi? I told you not to eat so many sweets! And do you know what he said back to me? (*The young man smirks.*) He said it's a complex. He says: from my childhood. And he adds: I never ate anything sweet, so now I have to catch up. Today we call it this a "complex," he says.

MRS. SMERDEL: How long have you been here?

YOUNG MAN: Where's "here"?

MRS. SMERDEL: I mean...here. In this—our—house.

YOUNG MAN: Oh! (*Looks at his watch.*) Well now...since precisely seven o'clock. At seven you left for the opera, right?

MRS. SMERDEL: Yes. At seven.

YOUNG MAN: Therefore, since exactly 7. I watched you come out. Then Bubi began to get on my nerves. Can you imagine what a brilliant idea he had? He said he wanted quince jam. And at Mrs. Smerdel's place there would surely be some. Believe me—I tried to talk him out of it for ten minutes, but he wouldn't relent. He wanted quince jam, and that's that. In the end, he started to make threats: he was going to abandon me if I didn't lead him to some preserves right away. He was going to leave me to twist in the wind and go over to your side. Yes, yes, he wanted to join forces with you. (*Dismayed.*) What choice did I have? Then he even began to use blackmail against me. He said he was prepared to tell certain people at a certain place certain things about me.

MRS. SMERDEL: That's interesting. Very interesting. And—why?

YOUNG MAN (*interrupting her*): Why? Why? Because I'm getting weak compared to him. That's why. (*Dejected.*) Do you think it's easy to stand up to him? He's spoiled. He's smart. Genial.

Clever. Well read. Sometimes even kind...and then again he's capable of being downright nauseating. He understands how to blackmail. And even to *steal*. He likes to go into strangers' apartments and open up jars of preserves and marmalade that decent people have laid by for the winter. And afterwards he's sick at his stomach. What can I do? The doctors say it's some sort of complex. But, you see, I can't do without him. I've already gotten far too used to his company. You know, when you're alone, any company will do. He's all I have, and he's all right. But, you see, I'm in no position to break him of this fetish! He's so happy to sit around in other people's houses, rifling through their stuff. He enjoys sitting in unfamiliar armchairs and eating off of unfamiliar plates. He's got no one besides me. He's got me and I've got him.

MRS. SMERDEL (*playing along*): Try to influence him. Find him a good doctor.

YOUNG MAN (*despondent*): There's no point, Mrs. Smerdel. It's all in vain. I've tried everything. The word is that he's incurable.

MRS. SMERDEL: Nevertheless...One never knows. Maybe there is some kind of medicine for him. For instance, why don't you try—

YOUNG MAN (*bristling*): —I tell you, it's all pointless! He's marked now, you know, denounced. They have his number. Do you want to know what his case is like? Is this of any interest to you at all, or am I getting on your nerves with my little stories?

MRS. SMERDEL: How should I put this? Honestly, I'm afraid that my husband will...

YOUNG MAN: Give me a break with this husband of yours! Have you not admitted yourself that he's a cheapskate? And that he's not worth talking about?

MRS. SMERDEL: I just wanted to warn you—

YOUNG MAN: You don't need to warn me about anything! We'll know when we're supposed to vamoose. Isn't that so, Bubi? Isn't that right? I'm asking you a question, Bubi...(To Mrs. Smerdel.) You see? He's angry. (*Conspiratorially*.) He's very sensitive. The littlest thing gets him all worked up...So where was I just now? Oh yes: I was asking you if I should fill you in

on that. On the situation with Bubi. As for your husband, you don't need to concern yourself with him. We'll know when it's time to get lost.

MRS. SMERDEL: Fine. Fill me in. If you wish, I'll make you some coffee. Or would you rather have something sweet? Some *more* sweets?

YOUNG MAN: For heaven's sake, don't remind me of that. Because he might be capable of downing another entire jar, even though he's already feeling sick. And it affects his mood. Besides (*he is reluctant to mention this*) he prefers to take his jam in private. When no one is watching. He's even embarrassed by my presence. But as far as coffee goes, you could make us some, insofar, of course, as it's not too much trouble for you. Shall I help?

Mrs. Smerdel rises to her feet and bustles off to the kitchen.

MRS. SMERDEL: No, no. But thanks. You can keep filling me in till the coffee's done. Only—

The young man is seated on the floor, and from his location he can observe Mrs. Smerdel's every move as she busies herself at the stove.

YOUNG MAN: Only?

MRS. SMERDEL: Nothing, nothing.

YOUNG MAN: What did you want to say?

MRS. SMERDEL: All right then. I only wanted to say that you are not on safe ground, you and...that—

YOUNG MAN: Bubi.

MRS. SMERDEL: That Bubi of yours. I mean that in terms of the time and all the rest of it, for, you see (*tries to act casual, even insouciant or humorous*) in this case you have miscalculated. What I mean is, you hadn't foreseen that I might come home early. That's what I am trying to say.

YOUNG MAN (*agitated, childish*): I knew you'd give me a hard time about that. But it's still hardly nice of you, believe me. And I swear to you, Mrs. Smerdel, that this is the first time that's happened. Ask him. (*Grimly.*) Moreover, this is your fault anyhow. Why the hell didn't you go see the stupid opera? Weren't you planning on seeing the opera?

MRS. SMERDEL: Oh, yes. I wanted to go see *La Traviata*.

YOUNG MAN: *La Traviata*! That's the only opera I've seen in my life. A long while ago. Ten, fifteen years back, or more.

MRS. SMERDEL: And did you like it?

YOUNG MAN: I don't know. I can't remember any more....Do you want me to tell you how it came about? Yes? Okay. Olja (a blonde co-ed in architecture, I think), Olja asked me if I liked *La Traviata*. I said: yes. She looked at me and laughed: why are you lying? Why are you telling me you like it when you've never ever been to an opera? How can someone like something they've neither seen nor heard? It's true, I said. I never have been to an opera and I haven't seen stupid old *La Traviata*, but I've seen it in crossword puzzles, and I know about it. I was a little miffed. You know, I don't like it when people hurl the truth right into my face, when they make fun of me and catch me in a lie! All I meant to say was that I'd gladly see that opera, or listen to it, whatever, because *she* was keen on going. Understand me? I was damned naïve and sweet. Back then. I just thought she was ashamed to invite me out of the blue to go to the opera, and I wanted to free her of this embarrassment. Who knows. Perhaps she really was ashamed. Maybe she was inhibited and couldn't bring herself to invite me...You see, that's why I told her that I liked *La Traviata*. I wanted to get her out of that bind. I wanted to get it over with. And then, you see, she had the advantage—that's what I call it—and she ceased being embarrassed and coy—because she sensed that I had come to occupy the weaker position with the discovery of the fact that I'd never been to an opera...And then when I realized that...(Stops.)

MRS. SMERDEL: What did you do then? Did you dump her?

YOUNG MAN: No, I blushed. And I do not enjoy being put into situations where I blush. That's when I get dangerous.

MRS. SMERDEL: I arrived too late.

YOUNG MAN: What?

MRS. SMERDEL: I got there too late for *La Traviata*. I don't think that's any fault of yours. First there were problems with the bus. Then—

YOUNG MAN: You popped in to see a friend.

THE PARROT

MRS. SMERDEL: You guessed it.

On a tray she brings in three cups of coffee.

MRS. SMERDEL: Here you go.

The young man sits down on the floor two or three meters from her. She puts his coffee on the table.

YOUNG MAN: And who's the third one for? The third serving of coffee, I mean?

Mrs. Smerdel is silent.

YOUNG MAN (*sternly*): I asked you a question: for whom is the third coffee? Surely you're not going to bore me with more about this husband of yours, are you?

MRS. SMERDEL (*relieved*): Well, I thought...(embarrassed) for your...Bubi.

YOUNG MAN: That's a horse of another color! Sorry. I thought you were going to bore me with information about your husband again. As for Bubi, I can report that he absolutely does not drink coffee. It's not good for him. Coffee makes him chatty and irritable. He has completely broken the habit of drinking it.

MRS. SMERDEL: All right, then. You can have it.

YOUNG MAN: Thank you. (*He doesn't touch the coffee. It remains untouched for the remainder of the play. Pause.*)

MRS. SMERDEL (*all of a sudden, as if it had just occurred to her that he might remain in her apartment for quite some time*): How long do you want to stay?

YOUNG MAN: What do you mean, how long?...Till the coast is clear. (*In an intimate whisper.*) I think they're tailing me.

MRS. SMERDEL: The police are looking for you?

YOUNG MAN: Seems that way to me...Did you by any chance happen to see a man in a cap at the door to the building? When you came home?

MRS. SMERDEL: No...I can't remember.

YOUNG MAN: Try to recall. He was leaning against the outside door, pretending to read a newspaper.

MRS. SMERDEL: Could be. I didn't notice anybody.

YOUNG MAN: But I was already there, on the other side, or on this side, however you like. I was in the stairwell. And you were just coming down.

MRS. SMERDEL: Why are they looking for you? What did you do, for heaven's sake?

YOUNG MAN: It's actually not me they're after. How shall I put this...They're looking for him. Bubi. He's been entering other people's homes and stealing jams and watermelon preserves.

MRS. SMERDEL: Only that?

YOUNG MAN: Naturally here and there he picks up some bauble or other on the way out. For example, a diamond bracelet or a gold watch. Occasionally some cash, too.

MRS. SMERDEL: Ah, yes...

YOUNG MAN: You know where this is going, right? I took him, you know, to the psychologist's office. And to a psychiatrist. It didn't help. All they said was that these were complexes. And then the psychologists, who are in cahoots with the cops, asked him how it was so easy for him to find the dough. Because, you know, he's got an infallible nose for cash! He enters a house and goes straight as an arrow to the bureau, third drawer. And there, under the lingerie, is the bread. Or how about another case: he comes in, takes a look around, and heads immediately to a vase filled with artificial roses. It blows my mind why anybody would keep flowers in their house that merely catch dust. Artificial roses. Whatever. Anyway, he grabs these plastic flowers, lifts them out, and a look crosses his face as if he had put his hands into something that reeks. Then he takes one hand and empties out everything in the vase and with the other he fishes out a wad of bills. And gives them to me, naturally enough. So I am just an accomplice of sorts. But a thief in the true sense of the word, you see—that's not me. You can see that for yourself. I think you will, if you believe my story. The third case...

MRS. SMERDEL: How did you find the money in this particular apartment?

YOUNG MAN: You mean, how did *he* unearth that jack? Quite simple. As usual. We entered, using this key here (pulls an ordinary little key from his pants pocket), and then we closed and

locked the door behind us. I left the rest to him. He walked into the room, turned around in a circle, and was within an ace of upending the mattress when he suddenly tears off towards your library. (If one can use that term to describe a few books like these.) That's when he stopped. His eyes came to rest on the dictionary by Vujaklija. Ah, you see, all day long a certain word had been bugging him...Oh, what was it...I can't remember. Something with "b". (*Gets to his feet, picks up the dictionary, and reads.*) *Buljan, bumaški, bumerang, bund, bunker, burg, burda*: "Mohammed's belt or cloak; later distinguishing sartorial item of the Abbasid caliphs; in addition: designation for an Arab religious song."...Here it is...

MRS. SMERDEL: Aren't you afraid that someone will find you here?

YOUNG MAN: No. And anyway you'll protect me. Isn't that right, Mrs. Smerdel? Wouldn't you stick up for someone who's in trouble?

MRS. SMERDEL: Well, it depends.

YOUNG MAN: It depends? On what, if I may ask? Did I not give you back that bracelet, which was dear to you because it was a keepsake? If I didn't, say so!

MRS. SMERDEL: Oh, but for heaven's sake...

YOUNG MAN: What do you mean, "oh, but"? There's no "oh, but" here. You told me that this bracelet was a beloved memento from your parents, and I returned it to you. That's all there is to it...Surely you don't think that according to the same logic I'm going to hand your money back over to you, do you? Why the hell did I even come here then? Surely you don't mean to claim that this money was *a beloved* keepsake, do you?

MRS. SMERDEL: I don't know what you want from me.

YOUNG MAN: For you to protect me. That's it. Plain and simple... When some guy shows up and asks if perchance some other guy is hiding in your flat, you'll answer no. You've looked everywhere, even under the bed, and you turned up no guy of any sort. I think you'll do this one little favor for us, for Bubi and me, right, Mrs. Smerdel? And when your husband turns up, you'll say to him that I'm a distant relative whom you haven't seen in quite a long time. (*Pause.*)

MRS. SMERDEL: That means the police *are* looking for you?

YOUNG MAN: For me? Oh, right. For Bubi, actually. Because of all the marmalade. I already told you about that.

MRS. SMERDEL: Is that the only reason?

YOUNG MAN: Most likely. In any case, I must protect him. He's like a brother to me. A friend. A companion.

MRS. SMERDEL: Do you love him very much?

YOUNG MAN: Yes.

MRS. SMERDEL: Perhaps you could help him...

YOUNG MAN (*as if shaken out of a stupor*): How?

MRS. SMERDEL: I don't know where I was going with this...You could be a good influence on him, or something like that.

YOUNG MAN: I could turn him over to the police and say: here, coppers, this is the Bubi you've been tracking down. Like that, eh? Or I could simply take him back to the reform school he escaped from, and tell them: I've brought you Bubi, who escaped from here for the sixth time about a month ago. He regrets it. He's prepared to put up with whatever you demand of him. He agrees to all of it. Everything, everything, everything. Is that what you wanted to suggest?

MRS. SMERDEL (*alarmed*): No...I don't know...I thought...

YOUNG MAN: Aha. Now I get it. You want to provoke me. You want to provoke *us*. Do you work for the police? Do you? And maybe your husband? Eh?

MRS. SMERDEL: The things you come up with!

YOUNG MAN: Yep, yep. You're from the police. Everybody is from the police. And don't start spouting explanations. I grasp everything. You want me to scram, and then you'll go call that guy without missing a beat, the one who's standing downstairs acting like he's reading the paper. That's what you would like to happen...But I won't give you that satisfaction...

MRS. SMERDEL: I was simply thinking about how you wanted to have a conversation with me...About Bubi, for instance.

YOUNG MAN (*beaming all of a sudden*): That's an equine of another hue! Let's talk about Bubi, then. It's a deal...(Stops, warily.) I find this suspicious. Everything is starting to seem like a provocation to me. If I let all his cats out of the bag, those peo-

ple will have a field day hunting for him. Do you know what would happen to Bubi if they caught him? No? (*Pause.*) He'd end up behind bars. Yep. I know!

MRS. SMERDEL: I thought we were going to have a conversation. But if you'd rather we be quiet...I won't utter another syllable more.

YOUNG MAN: What? You don't want to talk with us any more? Do we deserve that, now, Mrs. Smerdel? What have we done to deserve that? We'd feel insulted if you cut off the hospitality. Yes, yes, ma'am, insulted. We'd like nothing better—right, Bubi?—than to converse with you. How's that? (*Listens to Bubi's answer.*) Would you like to tell Mrs. Smerdel about that now?...I'm warning you! Bubi, you have completely lost your marbles. Is it so important for you to confess everything to her? Aren't you afraid she'll make fun of you?

MRS. SMERDEL: What's he saying?

YOUNG MAN (*as if he had not heard her*): Bubi, I beg you. I urge you for all I'm worth: don't get all sentimental and ridiculous. If you do, I'll leave you. I will leave you right here in the middle of the street. I'll sprint off. Or I'll strangle you.

MRS. SMERDEL: What's he saying?

YOUNG MAN (*motions to her to be quiet, because Bubi is speaking*): Unbelievable. Simply unbelievable how he wants to pour out his heart to everyone. Why don't you tell us yourself, Mrs. Smerdel, who cares what someone else is feeling inside? Who? Tell him, please.

MRS. SMERDEL: Well...I'd let him talk. If he's...

YOUNG MAN: You'd like to do it, then? Really? Bubi, Mrs. Smerdel would like to hear your story. Imagine that: the good Mrs. Smerdel wants you to tell about yourself. (*Somewhat embarrassed, cautious.*) I hope you're not trying to have one over on us. Eh? Laughing at our expense?

MRS. SMERDEL: Why, no. Believe me. I am rather curious...

YOUNG MAN: You're curious? I like that. You know, I can appreciate that, as long as your curiosity is, well, how shall I put it, well-intentioned. You've really got my head spinning. (*Bristling.*) I do not like it when people discombobulate me. Do you

understand? I don't like getting flustered! That's when I get dangerous, Mrs. Smerdel! Dangerous!

MRS. SMERDEL: I really don't know anymore how I'm supposed to behave. I mean, towards you and your Mr. Bubi. I thought...

YOUNG MAN: No, no, don't give up, dear Mrs. Smerdel. Now that you've stated that you're interested in Bubi's story, I want to tell you about him. See, people always criticized him for talking too much. They punished him, locking him in a cage and forbidding him to talk. They said he was a windbag, a motor-mouth. Yes, yes, that's what he's been called his whole life. He'd start to say, for instance, that he'd like to become an actor... Yes, yes, an actor. And they would start to laugh. They'd say to him: Bubi, you're a moron and you always will be. You should see to it that you learn to make ends meet instead of talking such drivel. Actor! What malarkey! (*Earnestly.*) I have a talent for acting, don't I, Mrs. Smerdel? Wouldn't you say so?

Mrs. Smerdel nods, though she cannot bring herself to answer.

YOUNG MAN: One time, ages ago, I saw a play, *Candide*. Have you heard of it? I can still remember the ending. I was, you know, in the play...By that I mean that I imagined I was this young man, Marchbanks, or whatever his name was. (*Acting.*) "Oh, no, never. Then I will forth, out into the night!" (*Stands there, in front of Mrs. Smerdel-Candide, in a pose both grotesque and pathetic.*) "In a hundred years we'll be equally old. But my heart holds a more beautiful secret than that. Let me forth. The night awaits me, full of impatience."

MRS. SMERDEL: I'm not holding you back...

YOUNG MAN: But...Didn't you promise to hear me out? Did you not say I should I talk? Didn't you say that he's waiting impatiently downstairs?

MRS. SMERDEL: Is this still part of that play of yours?

YOUNG MAN: I don't know. I don't think so. I'm getting very mixed up. (*Sadly.*) You destroyed the illusion.

MRS. SMERDEL: Very well. Go on then...

YOUNG MAN: Good, you agree...He wanted to become an actor, but they called him Parrot and Windbag (*Pause.*) Then, you

see, he started telling lies. He told stories, as if he had heard them from someone else, from his mother or father. He said: When I was still very young, my mother said to me...And people would ask: Hey, Bubi, why would your mother say something like that to you?...It was terrible, Mrs. Smerdel! At that point—it's ten years ago now—I was...he was...very sensitive on this subject. He started sticking up for himself, slugged all the guys in the face who didn't believe it when he said he'd heard something from his mother...Eventually everyone acted as though they believed that he'd heard it from his mother. Or from his father. Because they were afraid of him. Yes, they were afraid of him, because he fought for their existence, because he proved their existence and their goodness. He would fight you over them!!! For their imaginary image...(As if he were answering Mrs. Smerdel, who stares at him in amazement.) Don't pretend that you believe me one iota. You're just afraid of me. That's all. It's always been that way, whenever I've told Bubi's story...Yes, yes, Mrs. Smerdel. The story of Bubi. It's not my story. It's the story of a parrot... What? That doesn't surprise you in the least? Did you actually believe that I was hawking my tale as his? Or did you believe that he and I, Bubi and I, were one and the same person? Hah-hah-hah! That's ridiculous! I wouldn't have come up with that in a million years. Fantastic. Truly fantastic. Do you think I concocted all of this stuff about Bubi, and the rest of it? Hah-hah-hah. Unbelievable. Un-be-lie-va-ble. (Abruptly.) Mrs. Smerdel, you are dissembling. You only pay attention to me to kill the time till your husband gets home. That's why you're listening. If you even listen to me at all!

MRS. SMERDEL (*frightened*): Feel free to continue.

YOUNG MAN (*beaming, or bluffing*): I'm to go on with this? Bubi's story is of genuine interest to you?

MRS. SMERDEL: As I said, feel free to continue.

YOUNG MAN: Where did we leave off...Ah, yes. They called him a Chatty Cathy. But no one had the nerve to disbelieve him. He talked about his parents, his father and his mother, and everyone, friend and foe alike listened to him. Until one day

he ended up behind bars...You see what I mean. He had broken into an apartment and eaten up all the jams and jellies there.

MRS. SMERDEL: That's the only reason?

YOUNG MAN (*preoccupied, as if he had not understood her question*): What's that?

MRS. SMERDEL: It was merely on account of the marmalade that they—

YOUNG MAN: To be sure. Because of the jar of marmalade he gobbled up, they stuffed him into a cage. Do you understand? Like idiots, they asked him why he broke into an apartment just to eat a jar of jam. Do you know, Mrs. Smerdel, what his response was? (*Pause.*) Do you? (*Pause.*) Of course you know. But I'll tell you. (*Confidentially.*) He said he did it because, as a child, he never got any sweets. And...they taunted him. Into the cage he went...At that point he promised not to steal marmalade ever again. That is, he promised that he would never break into another apartment. If anything, he wanted to keep his eyes peeled for more useful things when in strangers' apartments, dropping this damn jelly thing that only served to make him a laughing stock. At first they called him a blowhard, because he liked to talk, liked to invent stories. Later some of them even mockingly called him "the Poet" or "the Thespian", and later still he got the nickname Jelly Roll, which, of course, has no connection to the name Jalal or Jaleel. Even though etymologically, they might look similar. Fine, he said, I'll move heaven and earth to get them to forget this nickname, and the first one, and all the others that are demeaning. I began to read on the sly, in the hope that I would one day get free. Then some psychologist came onto the scene. I think it was in the institution. He advised me to *stay the course*. He, this psychologist, that is, was going to help me. Therefore I continued reading, and I even timidly started writing poetry. I dunno, maybe you'd—nah, they definitely wouldn't interest you. My poems. I was thinking—but you'd have nothing but derision for them. I know it. Don't try ducking this one: you have no truck with poets. To you they seem dangerous and mad; they have the same effect on you as ventriloquists, and more than

anything—yes, yes, I know this to be true—you’d like to exile them to an island or turn them into kitchen help...I know. It was the same thing back there. Poet—it sounded like the ultimate insult. So one day, you see, I knocked some sense into one of the guys who was taunting me. Pronouncing that word “Poet” in such an offensive way, just to humiliate you. The end. Full stop. (*Pause.*)

MRS. SMERDEL: You haven’t drunk your coffee. It’ll get cold.

YOUNG MAN: The end. Full stop.

MRS. SMERDEL: I don’t understand.

YOUNG MAN: You did understand, and how. I can hear someone’s coming. Wait a sec...(*Listens intently, a little taken aback.*) Your husband, for sure. (*Conspiratorially.*) You see, they never let you tell your story through to the end. Someone always comes crashing in on it. (*We can hear somebody fumbling with a set of keys on the other side of the door.*) He’s sticking his key into the lock. Ah, my wife is already home. (*To the parrot.*) Bubi, simmer down now. Don’t start babbling. (*The doorbell rings.*)

Unnerved, Mrs. Smerdel walks to the door by herself.

MRS. SMERDEL: Get out of here, I urge you. That way. (*She points to the balcony.*)

YOUNG MAN: What? I’m supposed to leap from the third floor?... Or climb down the gutters? (*Another ring at the door.*) But you promised to listen to my story all the way through! Didn’t you?

MRS. SMERDEL (*while the doorbell goes off more and more insistently.*) But my husband—don’t you know—I urge you—(*points in the direction of the balcony.*) That way—I advise you to—

YOUNG MAN (*pats his jacket pocket*): And I advise you to open that door, stay calm, and do as you’ve been told. A small favor... (*Shoves her towards the door.*) I’m going to stay close...I’ll keep my eye on you...Don’t forget: a distant relative.

MRS. SMERDEL (*loudly*): Coming! I’m coming! Is that you, Anton? (*The doorbell rings even more shrilly.*)

YOUNG MAN (*whispers*): And leave the door open. (*Pats his pocket.*)

ANTON (*tumbling into the room*): Good grief. Have you gone deaf?

For a minute I thought something had happened to you...

What's going on? Why are you so pale? Bad news? (*Catches sight of the young man*) What—has—happened?

MRS. SMERDEL: Nothing, nothing! (*Looks over to the young man.*)

Take off your coat. We have a guest.

YOUNG MAN (*stands up*): I am from Virovitica, from Joža's family.

ANTON: Joža's family?

YOUNG MAN: I was explaining it to the lady. To your wife.

ANTON: Who is this?

YOUNG MAN: One of your wife's relations. Joža. From Virovitica.

MRS. SMERDEL: Ahem. Maybe I've mentioned him to you. Joža.

From Virovitica. A distant relation.

ANTON: Ah, yes. I think I vaguely remember that....Have a seat.

Marta, offer the man something to drink.

YOUNG MAN: As for me...

ANTON: I could stand another glass...I put a few away at a friend's house, but now...

YOUNG MAN: Did you lose?

ANTON (*bewildered*): What do you mean, lose?

YOUNG MAN: Were you playing poker?

ANTON: Oh—well—no. No. It was only among friends, you know. Does that mean she told you...?

YOUNG MAN: Only in passing. Yeah, no. But she wasn't complaining at all. She said (*turning now to face Mrs. Smerdel, who's bringing drinks*), she said, like one family member to another: Anton is playing poker, and I don't know when he'll be coming home. I'm sure he'd enjoy hearing you tell us how things have been going for Joža...

ANTON: For Joža?

YOUNG MAN: For Joža, from Virovitica. Your...

ANTON: Oh, right...But, Marta, I truly can't remember...Is that the relative you were telling me about?...What did you say, now—didn't he recently get remarried?

The young man gives Mrs. Smerdel a nod.

MRS. SMERDEL: That's the one.

ANTON: I thought he lived in Delnice...Didn't you tell me he lived in—

THE PARROT

YOUNG MAN: You're right. He did live in Delnice, but he moved.

A couple of months ago.

ANTON: I see. And how is Joža?

YOUNG MAN: Joža who?

ANTON: The one we're talking about! Marta, isn't he the one...

YOUNG MAN: Oh, right, right. But he died.

ANTON: Did he have children, Marta?

MRS. SMERDEL (*confused*): Children...Really now, to tell you the truth...

YOUNG MAN: One.

MRS. SMERDEL: Aha...(*Understands.*) A son.

YOUNG MAN: He's about thirty now.

MRS. SMERDEL: Thirty-three, if I'm remembering correctly. (*To the young man.*) Right?

YOUNG MAN: Exactly. (*Pondering.*) The age Christ was.

ANTON: And...how is he? There's something I can't quite put my finger on...

YOUNG MAN: He's having problems. That's why I came here.

ANTON: Problems?

YOUNG MAN: I was telling your wife about it.

ANTON: And your name is also Joža, right?

YOUNG MAN: Me?...Yes, yes. My name is Joža.

ANTON: Strange...So what has happened to him??

YOUNG MAN: To Joža?

ANTON: Joža's son. You said he's having problems.

YOUNG MAN: I told your wife about them...I'm afraid, you know, of taking up too much of your time. You'd like to go lie down. Plus I've got a friend waiting for me.

ANTON: No, keep your seat. Marta, why are you standing there looking mystified? Sit down, too. So why don't you phone up your friend and...

YOUNG MAN (*blurts out, with obvious curiosity*): Did you see him?

ANTON: Uh-huh. Would that be the young man down there in the doorway?

YOUNG MAN: Yep. Him. You know, he's quite shy. And rather odd. He likes waiting around reading the papers while he waits.

ANTON: For Pete's sake, have him come up. It can't be pleasant, waiting in the doorway.

YOUNG MAN: Oh, no, no. Don't you worry about him. He likes to say that I'll get back to him more quickly if...He actually does like to wait. He told me once how much fun it is for him. He says he reads the whole newspaper from cover to cover.

ANTON (*turned towards his wife*): Nevertheless, Marta.

MRS. SMERDEL: It's all right, Anton. If the young man wants to go, we shouldn't hold him up...I mean, there's his friend to consider.

YOUNG MAN: I was thinking that maybe you'd be interested to have me tell you more about Joža's son. But if not...(*Makes as if to leave.*)

ANTON: Hey, Marta—something's not right here...I truly don't recall your kinsman, I mean our kinsman, but I think it's only proper for us to listen to what happened to him...Right? I'll bet he's ended up in prison. (*Authoritatively.*) Now look here, if that is the case, inform him that I...regardless of my position, how should I put this, my...I can do nothing for him. That's what court is for, and—

YOUNG MAN: All he said was that I should tell you all about him, everything. How things are now and how they used to be... Give the Smerdels the message, he said...so they know what's going on...

ANTON: Okay, okay...even though I am still not clear about what he wants from me or from us.

MRS. SMERDEL: It looks as if he simply wants us to know of his problems...

ANTON (*ostensibly interested but still coming across as stiff and formal*): And how does he put bread on the table?

YOUNG MAN: Who, me?

ANTON: Your...our relative.

YOUNG MAN: He writes poetry.

ANTON: A poet? Heh, heh. You can't make a living that way.

YOUNG MAN: That's what he says, too.

ANTON: Then he has a career of some kind. I mean—

YOUNG MAN: You mean, some kind of proper job?

ANTON: Yes, the kind where one makes enough to live on. Writing poetry isn't a job, is it?

YOUNG MAN: No, it's not. He steals.

ANTON (*with consternation*): What?!? He steals?

YOUNG MAN: Yep. He steals.

ANTON (*to his wife, accusatorily*): That is why you've never talked about him! Be square with me. Did you have any idea about this?

MRS. SMERDEL (*flabbergasted*): No.

ANTON: Writes poems and steals. This is super. And what does he want with us all of a sudden? That I intervene for him—is that it?

YOUNG MAN: He only said for me to explain to you how it came to this. How it all started.

ANTON: I know already. The boy starts lifting things, and other folks are supposed to get him out of the jam he's in...Not happening.

YOUNG MAN: He only told me to tell you how it all happened. That is, I was supposed to explain it to your wife.

ANTON (*composed*): All right. So what happened? Go on. We're listening. Huh?

YOUNG MAN (*crushed*): I'm thinking it might be better if I left right now...

ANTON: No, no, please. Just talk. Marta, for God's sake, there's no point in—

MRS. SMERDEL: But maybe the young man's in a hurry, Anton. You ought to let him—

ANTON (*harshly*): Marta! (*To the young man.*) You talk. I'm happy to listen, but still I will not—

YOUNG MAN: I'm sorry, but I'm not at all comfortable with this... On account of your wife...I don't want to be an imposition. You know, I was asked to tell you everything, all about how things happened, but I can see your wife isn't in the mood for it.

ANTON: You know, she's a little frosted with me (*speaking intimately to the young man*) because of that poker game. You go right ahead. Now then, what did you say his name was again?

YOUNG MAN: Joža.

ANTON (*automatically*): So, Joža...(Pauses, perplexed.) Him, too?

YOUNG MAN: What?

ANTON: He's also Joža?

YOUNG MAN: Yep. Joža, son of Joža from Virovitica.

ANTON: That's odd. Anyway...

YOUNG MAN (*looking at Mrs. Smerdel*): All right. But, really, if you are tired, I can come back some other time...when I'm back this way...in ten days or so. I mean, if it's the case that Mrs. Smerdel is fatigued...

MRS. SMERDEL: It's all right...Go on. But now your coffee has grown completely cold.

YOUNG MAN: Should I go on? You really want me to?

ANTON: Get cracking. So we can hear how it happened. If I understand you correctly, then, he's in prison?

YOUNG MAN: Oh, no. As I've already told your wife, you see, he's— (*Facing Mrs. Smerdel.*) Where did I leave off?

MRS. SMERDEL: I can't recall exactly. You were telling us that your friend Bubi...

YOUNG MAN: Bubi who?

ANTON: Yeah, which Bubi? Is that his nickname?

YOUNG MAN: Ah, right. Now I remember. Sometimes I call him Bubi. That's his nickname. In the underworld.

ANTON: Underworld?!?

YOUNG MAN: Yes, unfortunately. You see, he's—

ANTON: Marta, you never told me about this. Unreal!

YOUNG MAN: I'm sure it was most uncomfortable for your wife... To speak of such, I mean. Perhaps I shouldn't have brought it up...Forgive me.

ANTON: What can you do? Whatever...

YOUNG MAN: So, I was telling your wife before you came home that he, Joža, or Bubi, as you wish (at all events your relative, I mean to say, the lady's relative, distant relative), well, you see, I was saying—right?—that first he began to make things up...

ANTON: You mean: he began to tell lies.

YOUNG MAN: No, no. Not at all...Simply to think up things. He started telling stories that he had supposedly heard from his mother.

ANTON: And what was up with her? Honestly, I'm out of my element here.

YOUNG MAN: You'll find out more about that. The truth is, he didn't have a mother. Or a father. He had no one. A foundling he was...Uh-huh...

ANTON: I don't get it. And Joža?

YOUNG MAN: Joža was his adoptive father. Something like that. He found him in front of his house, or somewhere else. I don't even know myself.

ANTON: Aha. Now it's becoming clearer to me.

YOUNG MAN: You see there?

ANTON: Keep going then.

YOUNG MAN: One day the young man found out he was a foundling. I don't think I got to that part with your wife yet. It was then that he abandoned Joža and began to concoct things, and to...steal. He'd go into houses and steal jams and jellies.

ANTON: Jams and jellies?

YOUNG MAN: Yes. I already told your wife about it. Later he ceased purloining such things, because he had wrecked his stomach with all those sweets, and he switched to taking things like money, jewelry, and so forth.

ANTON: Yes, that's the beginning of the slippery slope. Downhill from there. At first sweets, and in the end outrageous burglaries. It's dialectical.

YOUNG MAN: It's robbery. Nothing to do with the dialectic.

ANTON (*placating him*): Fine, fine. Do go on.

YOUNG MAN: Your relative, your distant relative, so he started stealing. Okay. Then he went off to a reform school. One day while there he read in a newspaper that a family was searching for a son who had disappeared during the war. You're familiar with those "Missing Relatives" ads? He wrote, but when they wrote back they told him the details didn't match up; therefore, unfortunately...you know how that goes. Then he began to go through the "Missing Relatives" columns in all the papers. Until, one day—maybe you read about it—he found a family. They took him in. And suddenly he had found a mother and a father, sisters and brothers. The papers ran their photos. The overjoyed mother hugging her son. The lucky son in the embrace of the overjoyed mother. After twenty years. In the fog of war. Long-

delayed elation, stuff like that. The story was even carried by foreign newspapers...And then, one fine day—

ANTON: He robbed them!

YOUNG MAN (*heartbroken, affronted*): The things you come up with!...Don't you remember? Didn't you read about it?

MRS. SMERDEL: I think we did read about that, Anton. It turned out that the young man was not their son at all.

YOUNG MAN: There wasn't anything that "turned out". He was sitting there under a stranger's roof, next to an overjoyed mother who had found her lost son, and then one day, out of a clear blue sky, he simply disappeared. He left behind a letter in which he admitted that he had planned everything, memorized every detail, before he got in touch with them. Even the famous scar under his shoulder blade, by which the happy mother had recognized him, even that he'd inflicted upon himself. He lifted his shirt up and sliced his skin open with a knife...Like this (*the young man lifts his shirt*)...Look here

ANTON (*putting on his spectacles, perplexed*): So you are—

MRS. SMERDEL: He is!

YOUNG MAN: Yes. That's who I am! Nobody remembers the pictures of me in the newspaper. Or the ones from the trial.

ANTON: Were you convicted?

YOUNG MAN: Yes. Of fraud. And theft.

ANTON: Then you did rob them.

YOUNG MAN: I only took money for a trip. I needed a boatload of money. I wanted to continue my search. I wanted to find out who I was and what my name is...And there you have it.

ANTON: So be it. But what is it you actually want from us? Marta—what does he want from us? Do you even know who this is? I have a strange feeling about all this.

MRS. SMERDEL: Well...How should I put this...

The young man pats his pocket.

MRS. SMERDEL: As I said, I wasn't completely in the clear about all this, but I had heard about it...

YOUNG MAN (*brusquely*): This Joža from Virovitica, my adoptive father, he's a relative of your wife...Isn't that so, Mrs. Smerdel?

MRS. SMERDEL (*hesitantly*): Yes, yes...I already said as much...He is.

YOUNG MAN: And when did you last see him? (*Winks at Anton.*)

When was the last time you saw him?

MRS. SMERDEL (*confused*): When...? Who? I don't follow...

YOUNG MAN (*winking at Anton again*): I'm asking you when you last saw him.

ANTON: Really, when *did* you—(*To the young man.*) I actually don't remember her ever...

YOUNG MAN (*interrupting him gruffly*): I wasn't asking you, sir... What was your name again?

ANTON: Anton.

YOUNG MAN: Not you, Anton, but your wife. (*Winks now at Mrs. Smerdel.*) Well? (*To her.*) When did you last see him, ol'—What was his name again?

MRS. SMERDEL: Joža...

YOUNG MAN: Right. This (*gives an insinuating wink to Anton*) relative of yours? Eh? Answer me, Mrs. Smerdel.

MRS. SMERDEL: Well, I think...I can't recall precisely. It's probably been a couple...

YOUNG MAN (*winking again at Anton*): A couple of?

MRS. SMERDEL: Several years ago. Let's say five or six.

YOUNG MAN (*as if in cahoots with Anton*): Why "let's say"?

ANTON (*anxiously*): I don't understand what you're getting at. Are you perhaps with—

YOUNG MAN (*interrupts Anton rudely as he turns to face him*): Let your wife give her two cents' worth first...(Brief pause, as if he needed to weigh something in his mind). And as for your question, no—I am not from the police...So let's hear what Mrs. Smerdel has to say. (*Winks amiably at Anton.*) Well? Why "let's say"?

MRS. SMERDEL: How should I put it. One is never sure. Yes....

YOUNG MAN (*apparently insulted, or genuinely so*): Oh, you see ma'am, that's not nice of you.

ANTON (*precipitously*): And what, if I may ask, is not nice about it? What is it you want actually?

YOUNG MAN (*not listening to him*): That's not nice of you, Mrs. Smerdel. It's not.

ANTON (*emboldened*): If I may say so myself, where do you get off telling us what's nice and what's not? Marta, what does he want with us?

YOUNG MAN (*with an almost unfriendly expression on his face, places his finger to his lips, signaling to Anton that he should just listen and keep out of this*): Fine, fine. Everything's in order. So it's not important in your eyes whether we have a frank discussion about everything or not. Should I finish telling my story about Bubi, I mean about Joža, that is.... about your...our relative?

MRS. SMERDEL: I do not understand you. Anton, I really don't get him.

ANTON (*sternly*): What is it you want? Really, young man! I think you've told us quite enough. Are you aiming for us to pay your travel expenses? Or do you have some actual news for us?

YOUNG MAN (*surprised by so much opposition, disappointed*): Oh, all right. I'll just be on my merry way. You know, Mr....

ANTON: It doesn't matter.

YOUNG MAN: Mr. It doesn't matter...

ANTON: I said that it doesn't matter. That's not my name. My name is Anton.

YOUNG MAN: I beg your pardon. Excuse me. A thousand times over. Mr. Anton, I've kept you too long, really. You're quite right about that...But in regard to the money for the trip and so on: absolutely not. (*Acting, with pathos.*) Heaven forbid! Where ever did you get that idea? I mean, really! That would be too much. Certainly, absolutely, not. I wanted to tell your wife the story of Bubi. All the way through to the end.

ANTON (*furious, understanding nothing*): To hell with you and your...Bubi—you go to hell! I really don't know what's going on anymore. Please explain to me who's who. And what you want from us. And who you are.

YOUNG MAN (*winking to Mrs. Smerdel*): You know, your spouse has requested that, too.

ANTON: And now I'm asking for it, too.

YOUNG MAN: Do you know what my answer to her was?

ANTON: I couldn't care less what you—

THE PARROT

YOUNG MAN: I lied, sir.

ANTON (*doesn't understand*): You lied to her?

YOUNG MAN: Yes, the way she lied to you.

ANTON (*gets to his feet*): Now this is really the limit. You tell—

YOUNG MAN: Tell your spouse, Mrs. Smerdel, that you deceived him. Admit it.

MRS. SMERDEL (*in desperation*): Anton, he is lying.

YOUNG MAN: Ask your spouse who this man Joža from Virovitica is.

Anton looks over at his wife, expecting an answer.

YOUNG MAN: Just ask her and you will see that she was lying.

MRS. SMERDEL: Anton, I did not lie. He is lying. He's a—

ANTON: Who are you, anyway?

YOUNG MAN (*turns once more to his parrot*): Who are you? Who are you? Didn't the gentleman ask you who you are? Huh? Bubi, didn't we ask the gentleman who he is?

ANTON (*aghast*): You're—you—

YOUNG MAN: You mean to say—(*Leans over towards Mrs. Smerdel.*) See, ma'am, he thinks I'm crazy. Tell him whether I'm crazy or not...Knock yourself out, Mrs. Smerdel. Tell him.

MRS. SMERDEL (*crushed*): Anton, this is a great big mess.

YOUNG MAN: Bubi, Bubi...I believe our presence here is not desired. They think we're mad. (*Rudely, to Mrs. Smerdel.*) You see, Mrs. Smerdel, all that time we were thinking that you'd hear us out.

ANTON (*calmly*): For God's sake, Marta, why don't you listen to the young man?...He feels the need to share something with us.

YOUNG MAN: Nonsense! You consider me crazy. I mean, us, Bobby and me...Therefore you're only pretending, sir.

ANTON: In any case...All right. But why do you talk to yourself?

YOUNG MAN: To myself? Hah, no. That's ridiculous. (*Laughs.*) It just seems that way to you. Ask Marta. She's in on it. Right?

MRS. SMERDEL: Be kind enough to go, and tell Joža—

YOUNG MAN: Which Joža?

MRS. SMERDEL: The one who's your—our—

YOUNG MAN: I don't know anyone called Joža, Mrs. Smerdel. Just as you do not, by the way.

ANTON: If I may...I think we've had quite enough of this.

YOUNG MAN (*feigning distraction*): Bubi, we're being chased away.

The lady is telling lies, and the gentleman thinks we're bonkers.

ANTON: Besides, your friend is waiting for you. You've had him wait for a whole hour down there now.

YOUNG MAN: Would you be so kind as to invite him up, sir?

ANTON: Invite him up?...There's no reason to...(*Brusquely.*) And anyway—(*Standing up.*)

YOUNG MAN: No, no! Stay here. It'd be just like you to...I mean, it'd be just like you to call the fuzz.

ANTON: The fuzz...Isn't that guy a friend of yours? Didn't you say yourself that a friend was waiting for you downstairs?

YOUNG MAN: I did say that, but I lied to you. Actually—how should express this—maybe I wasn't lying, but rather, you know...I was only telling a story. Inventing things.

MRS. SMERDEL: Anton, go have a look anyway for that—

YOUNG MAN: No, no! Under no circumstances! (*Stands up.*) I think we'll end up having to go over there after all, Bubi. (*Moves in the direction of the outside balcony to which Mrs. Smerdel had pointed earlier.*) I don't exactly trust your husband a lot, Mrs. Smerdel. (*To the parrot.*) What was his name again, Bubi? (*Listens for the answer.*) Anton. Right, no trust for Mr. Anton.

ANTON (*leaps up precipitously from his chair*): That's it! Get out!

Points his finger toward the entrance to the apartment and then takes up a position right by the open door.

ANTON: Get out!

YOUNG MAN: Bubi, I do believe we're not welcome here in the least. (*Goes to the door to the balcony and opens it.*)

YOUNG MAN: I do believe we'd be more comfortable out here...Did you not advise us, Mrs. Smerdel, to retreat in this direction? *Per aspera ad astra.* (*Outside the stars are visible in the clear night sky.*) That's how the old saying goes, right, sir?

ANTON (*enraged, rushing to the telephone*): Now you're in for it... I've had all I can take.

YOUNG MAN: When I jump, Bubi, dig your claws into my shoulder tight.

The young man flings the balcony door wide open, pulling a plastic toy pistol out of his pocket.

MRS. SMERDEL: Anton! Anton, watch out! He's armed! Oh, Anton!

Anton notices that the telephone wires have been ripped out of the wall. He rushes to his bedroom, from which he can hear Mrs. Smerdel's final words. They are, in fact, a cry for help. He opens a cabinet in which we catch sight of two or three hunting rifles, along with bandoliers, a revolver in its holster, and a carbine. Maybe there's also a machine gun in there. The director and the scenographer should not be stingy with props here, all the more so because the author took the time to think all this up. That's occasion, and justification, enough.

YOUNG MAN: So it's goodbye then, Mrs. Smerdel. (Now only his head is sticking up over the railing of the balcony. He's reciting something.) "Let me forth. The night awaits me, full of impatience." (Then he plunges unexpectedly into the void.)

Outside.

At the moment that the young man slams into the ground, we can suddenly see a broad, tall building, of the type found in Novi Beograd or other postwar housing developments, which are perhaps perfect from an architectonic vantage point but which are completely inhumane from the residents' point of view. This huge building, in which lights were burning only here or there prior to the impact of the young man's body, lights up all of a sudden, completely unexpectedly: unreal light beams forth from all, or almost all, of the windows, a light spectral, terrible, and unnatural, coming after all the drapes had been pulled apart and the windows flung open, as if on command; in this effulgence of electric and neon light all the stars and the sky disappeared.

Everything now happens with terrible speed. In the just opened windows that are streaming light, large numbers of skeet shooters appear. Their poses are as casual as if they were standing at a booth at the fair; they fill the windows, this legion of marksmen used to clay pigeons. Their heads rest on the stocks of their long rifles (not hunting rifles, or not only hunting rifles); and they begin to fire, muzzles blazing, at the young man, who—riddled by the stream of bullets and by the beams of harsh light from the apartment building—is starting to sway on his feet.

THE PARROT

For this scene the editor may want to use sharpshooters of both genders, but the young man should die in whatever setting the director thinks is most appropriate during filming: atop dried leaves, in a bed of cabbage, in virgin snow, on a garbage heap, between parked cars, or alongside a bare white wall, where one can observe the baleful effect of the shots.
Music.

THE END

A WOODEN TRUNK FOR THOMAS WOLFE

“Better a cracked vessel than the musings of a lazy man.”

—Indian proverb



CHARACTERS

JAKOV

THE DOCTOR (SOLOMON SINGER)



NOTE

Aside from the changing seasons (which for the most part are not sequential seasons of one year but rather individual seasons from different years), the director should achieve the passage of time with other means at his disposal: with each new season, the protagonists are visibly older. The friendship between Dr. Singer and Jakov lasts for fifteen, if not twenty, years. This should certainly be in evidence on their faces, in their voices, and on their bodies.

As the sole musical accompaniment, a recording of a rabbi's singing should be used at the designated spots. It would be ideal to have a recording made by the Germans before the execution of a group of Jews together with a rabbi who had been ordered to sing for the repose of their souls.

PART ONE: AUTUMN

I.

Frames click past: archival material from the Second World War: camp wire, hysterical children, dead bodies on barbed-wire fences, "living corpses", camp musicians in carts, piles of victims' glasses, hair, shoes and clothes, bulldozers clearing away corpses, etc.

Gradually the lens pulls back, and we see that we have just been in attendance at the showing of a documentary in a movie-house. During the final scenes, one can already hear the banging of the seat-bottoms and see the tilted ray of light from the projector. For a moment the screen is lit up by white light, and on it appear the silhouettes of people who have stood up from the seats in the balcony. The lights in the theater slowly go up. The last members of the audience crowd around the exit.

The usher, a woman wearing a uniform with a belt around her waist and with a stern, tomboyish expression, slams shut one side of the exit doors, and then takes a look around the semidarkness of the hall. Lines: rows of wooden seats. The beam of her flashlight loops around the empty hall. Then the beam drops lower, down to the floor: the empty hulls of sunflower seeds, apple cores, a piece of bread teeming with ants, crumpled pieces of paper, cockroaches.

On the right-hand side, standing in front of the damp, scuffed-up wall, is a large cast-iron stove, the fire in which has just about gone out. Near the stove we see a man. His hands are folded across his stomach, and he's staring blankly in the direction of the screen. This is Jakov. His pudginess comes across as a kind of sloppiness. He is wearing a worn-out suit, although one can also see that he puts a certain amount of effort into cutting a proper figure. He is sitting there in his coat, cringing a bit at the cold. For a moment he seems to be sleeping; his eyes open and close again but the expression on his face looks more like meditation than slumber.

The flashlight beam flits around him nervously, like a warning, in the now darkened hall. Now Jakov begins wrapping the muffler around his neck; until then it had been lying in his lap. But he makes this move without haste, as if putting on the scarf is unrelated to the usher's warning. Slowly he gets to his feet, lost in thought. He moves along the rows, absent-mindedly, towards the door.

II.

Jakov, exiting the hall, reaches the dirty, poorly-lit corridor. A beam of the flashlight follows him, circling his body. Jakov stops. Incrementally the usher's beam of light reveals scaffolding, beams, and planks in the corridor, as well as piles of sand, a mixing trough for mortar, pails of whitewash, ladders. (Apparently the entrance to the cinema is being renovated and freshly whitewashed.)

The beam of light rests for a moment on a man behind a ladder, next to a diagonal board of the scaffolding. This is the doctor. When the beam alights on his face, he panics and covers his face with his hands, as if caught at something. Then the light goes, makes its way back to Jakov at the very moment he knocks over a pail. We see him groping his way along the wall, looking somewhat agitated and confused. He stands still for a moment. We see a hand (the hand of the doctor) come to rest on his upper arm. Jakov stops again, shocked. One gets the impression he's going to bolt. The doctor pulls gently at his arm. He's in his fifties. He's wearing a long, shabby coat and a soft hat, with an umbrella over his arm and a scarf around his neck.

All of a sudden they are out from under the scaffolding, in the grubby corridor that is lit by a flickering light bulb. Slowly they make their way toward the exit, which can be seen out in front of them at the end of the corridor.

Both of them have prominent traces of whitewash on their coats, similar to those used to designate deserters and convicts in the camps. They turn once to face the harsh beam that is tracking them, operated by an invisible hand, from the other end of the hallway.

They arrive at the small, vaulted doorway to the street, where they halt.

JAKOV (*brushing off his coat*): Thank you.

DOKTOR: Do you know how long this scaffolding has been here?

Three months already. At least three months.

JAKOV: Imagine a fire breaking out!

He continues dusting off his jacket.

JAKOV: Or if the scaffolding were to collapse.

III.

Heavy rain is falling outside. Jakov and the doctor pause for a moment and look up at the night sky. There's a curtain of rain in front of the streetlights.

On both sides of the entrance to the cinema there are poorly lit display cases with posters and advertising stills from films of the 1950s. The titles are plainly visible.

They both stand there for a moment, without speaking, like people who have nothing more to say to each other; they are five or six steps apart, each turned to the side. After a period of time, the doctor opens his umbrella, and Jakov turns up the collar of his coat as if he were about to depart. Holding the umbrella out in front of him, the doctor looks over at Jakov, who is pretending not to notice the other man. The doctor moves a bit closer to Jakov, open umbrella and all. A few pedestrians scurry past.

DOKTOR (*confidentially*): I saw you...I was standing to the side, behind a column.

Jakov looks at him distractedly, without understanding.

DOKTOR (*whispers, as if it were a secret, while concealing Jakov and himself behind the umbrella*): Do you know how horrible the stench was? (*Resigned, pensive.*) You don't know. You do not know. (*After a short pause.*) You couldn't know!

JAKOV: In this movie house a person can get an inkling of it...of that stench.

Pause.

JAKOV: It's not going to let up any time soon. This is the third day it has poured...

DOKTOR: I was watching you. (*Intimately.*) You were moved. (*Looks at him as if this were an interrogation.*) You were the only one. Do you understand what I mean? You were the only one who understood this crime. You alone were shocked...And riveted to your seat!

JAKOV (*confused*): How should I say this...It was stifling...And that stove was putting out so much smoke.

DOKTOR: No, no! That won't work on me...You were sincere...
Utterly moved.

The usher appears at the door behind their backs, wearing a black rain-coat. She is just locking the doors. She looks at the two of them suspiciously. One has the feeling she's about to say something to them. But suddenly she thinks the better of it and bustles by them, out into the rainy night.

DOKTOR (*waiting until her steps fade in the distance*): No, no, you did not doze off. (*Confidentially.*) I was observing you. (*With a motion of his hand, the doctor interrupts Jakob, who was getting ready to say something.*) Did you see the way folks dashed out of there? Did you see that? Completely indifferent. (*Pause.*) And there was that horrific stench...Especially on days when the cloud cover was low. Terrible! You cannot conceive of it. No one can imagine it...No one!

JAKOV: Some kind of stinky smoke...

DOKTOR: Only you, young man...*You* alone felt it.

JAKOV: A woman next to me was eating sandwiches wrapped in crinkly wax paper...Sandwiches with salami.

DOCTOR: You see, people get accustomed to everything...The world slowly forgets. Slowly but surely.

JAKOV: And they keep eating their salami sandwiches wrapped in wax paper.

DOCTOR: And then in the corridor I was completely certain that you were the only person—not including myself—who had been rattled by these things. Truly rattled and alarmed...That's why I waited for you.

JAKOV (*amazed*): You waited?

DOCTOR (*intimately*): I thought you were one of us...I mean...a former...To this day I've never come across anyone from a camp... regardless of which one of the camps...and not been able to sense it. (*Taps his finger against his nose.*) It leaves a certain trace on a person...something...

JAKOV: I spent my childhood in homes for war orphans. Not to mention my youth...Those were also camps.

Pause.

They stand there a while longer without talking, staring into the night, at the rain.

JAKOV (*contemplative*): Maybe it was a way of rounding out the family story...

DOKTOR (*interested*): Your people...?

JAKOV: Disappeared! Understand? Poof! Vanished...Father, mother, sister. (*Pause.*) Do you know what I was thinking about back there in the cinema? About the chance that one of those pairs of glasses on the pile could have belonged to my father, and I tried to find *that very pair* amidst all the glasses...And that one of the strands of hair lying in the other heap could have come from the head of my mother or sister...My little sister had red hair...

DOCTOR (*takes off his iron-rimmed glasses and holds them up to the streetlight*): So you see, I came back...The only one.

JAKOV: That's how the documents put it: disappeared.

DOCTOR: So I guess I wasn't too far off the mark...You see, my old nose never lets me down.

Pause.

JAKOV: It's not going to quit any time soon.

DOCTOR: This kind of martyrdom leaves a special stamp on a person. A stigma. Something in the expression on his or her face... In the eyes...In someone's movements...

Suddenly, without discussing it, the doctor and Jakov begin to stroll, under the same umbrella, like old friends.

DOCTOR (*continuing*): And if a person practices, he or she is soon in a position to distinguish between a convict like a burglar or a camp inmate...In Auschwitz we...

His voice drops off, submerges in the rain.

They walk into the night, and we follow behind them for a while. We see them in an empty, muddy street in a poorly lighted working-class district. The shrill whistle of a locomotive (from which we sense they are approaching a train station or a rail crossing).

Darkness.

IV.

In the doctor's home. A close-up of the cover of a book, with someone's hand flipping through the pages, with just enough time for us to read the title:

BUTTERKREM UND FONDANT VERZIERUNGEN

von

ADOLF HECKMANN¹

Pages slide past, illustrated with examples of decorated cakes.

DOCTOR: I translated this book in the camp, before they pulled a number of us out of the officer's section...For you this is just an ordinary book about decorating cakes, right?

Jakov is seated at the doctor's desk, holding the book in his hands. The doctor leans over him for a moment. The desk is stacked with books, and on the right-hand side of it, in a wooden frame, is a group picture in which we can see the doctor, in his younger years, with his wife and daughter. The room is that of a bachelor, an old man, with pieces of furniture in various styles, such as a scuffed-up easy chair, a bookshelf, and a half-made bed. On one little table we notice a menorah.

On the wall: a poster showing the internal organs and circulation of the blood in the human body.

An old-fashioned gramophone, complete with ear-horn, with one record on it. Just one single record.

Jakov flips through the book. The doctor pokes around, looking for something on his crowded desk. Then he picks up a grimy old notebook and hands it to Jakov.

DOCTOR: Read this...You'll definitely find it interesting.

The doctor goes back to his place in the easy chair near the desk. But prior to that he pours Jakov and himself a drink from a bottle bearing a label that he had apparently glued on himself. Jakov swallows a mouthful of the rakija, while the doctor wraps his glass in both hands and nurses his drink. In his lap sits a cat that is losing its fur. Throughout the rest of the play it will rub itself against his feet and legs.

¹ German in the original. English translation: "Butter Cream and Fondant Decorations by Adolf Heckmann".

DOCTOR: The ink has faded a bit, but it's still legible...Come closer to the light.

JAKOV: "Cake decorating with butter cream and fondant, written by..."

DOCTOR: Skip that part...A bit further along.

JAKOV (*reads slowly, with a certain amount of effort, and, as if he were near-sighted, he holds the notebook closer to the table lamp with the shade*): "For my sweet...little girl...Mirjam Singer... translated by the Captain of the Medical Reserve Corps, P.O.W. number..."

At that moment, without getting to his feet, the doctor yanks up his sleeve and shows Jakov the number tattooed onto his forearm: 6510. Jakov glances at the doctor's arm, then at the number in the book, as if to compare them, and then continues reading.

JAKOV: "6,5,1,0...Oflag 8-B...Block 5, Barracks No. 75...(Downs another gulp of his rakija.) The translation was completed in Nürnberg-Langwa..."

DOCTOR: Nürnberg-Langwasser.

JAKOV: "Oflag 13-B...5 June 1942..."

DOCTOR: That's when I thought they were still alive...(Shows Jakov the framed photograph.)

Pause.

JAKOV (*with the notebook still in his hands, reads further*): "Are birds and other animals still considered modern as decoration for butter cream? The cakes depicted in this book show the best way to produce birds and other animals: doves, rabbits, storks, sea-gulls... (*Skips ahead.*) Flowers, with the exception of roses, one squirts directly onto the surface prepared for them..." (*Pause.*) My little sister would be twenty years old now...(Closes the notebook.) I don't even have this much! Not a photo. Not any kind of written memento.

DOCTOR: But you have your ambition...to preserve it all from oblivion, to reanimate it....How did you put it?—By any means possible, divine or human...

JAKOV (*melancholy*): I was watching through a crack, between two

bricks. (*Pause.*) While she was helping my little sister into the truck, my mother turned around to the house and it seemed like she was saying something to me...Or did she just scream because they hit her?

DOCTOR: You see, I grasped all that earlier this evening...in the cinema. I read your story on your face, like from an open book... (*Pause.*) And your father? What happened to your father?

JAKOV (*as if he had missed hearing the question*): I see my mother as Lot's wife, who turned into a pillar of salt. (*Pause.*) I wasn't even ten years old...

The doctor stands up, pours Jakov another drink, and then begins pacing back and forth in the room.

DOCTOR: You said ten?

JAKOV: Old enough to suffer.

Pause.

DOCTOR: Today my son would be...(Stops pacing all of a sudden.)

Jakov picks up the photograph in its wooden frame from the table and looks at it closely. The doctor rips the picture out of his hand and places it on the very edge of the table, away from Jakov. It falls over and lands on the floor. The doctor bends down to search for it under the table.

DOCTOR (*from under the table*): He isn't with us in the photo. (*Pause.*) He isn't anywhere. (*The doctor straightens up and places the frame back on the table. The glass is cracked.*) That is to say, he never existed.

The doctor is now standing up. He removes the book on cakes and the notebook with the translation from the table, puts them in the desk drawer, and locks it.

Fade to black.

V.

Jakov and the doctor are in the elevator. It's an old-fashioned type with wooden double doors and a sliding iron grate. Inside the elevator are

fancy, stylized mirrors that are scratched and halfway flaking off. A large brass handle is used to put the elevator into motion, like in old hotels. Next to the handle, in a corner, is a small seat that folds out from the wall. The doctor is fiddling around with the handle. A weak little light bulb burns in the ceiling. The light goes on and off, though, capriciously, giving the impression that the elevator itself is moody.

DOCTOR: Seder spirits. Seventy percent. (*Holds up a finger.*) Watch out! It will go to your head. Imperceptibly but without mercy.

The elevator lurches into motion, clanking and squeaking.

DOCTOR: One day I'll give you the recipe...like the old masters, who passed on to their students the secrets of their craft.

The elevator stops again. The doctor keeps working the handle, and the lift resumes its journey upward. Jakov appears not to notice any of this. It is apparently because the "Seder spirits" have already gone to his head. In the mirror his eyes are glued to the doctor's head, of which the crown is visible: gray hair and a bald area in the shape of a tonsure. The doctor has also not been spared the effects of the alcohol. He is seated on the little wooden chair and is clumsily operating the handle. The lift alternates between going up and going down. A spectral light falls over the two men, whose outlines we see sometimes in the mirror and sometimes through the iron lattice.

JAKOV (*in the mirror, as if to himself*): I have put ten years of thought into my book, Doctor...Ten years of gloomy nightmares and insomnia!

DOCTOR (*in the semi-darkness, invisible save his tonsure*): How magnificently you said that: I see my mother as Lot's wife, turning into a pillar of salt....

JAKOV (*to himself, in the mirror*): I subordinated everything to it! Everything!...The lives of a great number of people will go into that book. The experience of millions!

DOCTOR (*still invisible in the semi-darkness, from which his bald spot gleams*): You can write it! You must! You have a whole lifetime ahead of you, Jakov...

JAKOV (*into the mirror, finishing his previous thought*): Yes, yes.

My own life will go into it, too. My entire existence. (*He moves his face closer to the mirror and touches the wrinkles around his eyes.*)

DOCTOR: I meant to say, rather, half a lifetime. (*Pause. The clunking of the lift.*) You must write it, Jakov: the Book of suffering... You can do it...

JAKOV: There's no rush, Doctor, Things have to mature inside a person. They have to escape from their cocoon by themselves... May the spirit of my departed ones have mercy on me...

DOCTOR: You have to write it down...Everything that you saw through the crack between the two bricks. And everything that I have seen. (*The elevator pauses again. The doctor looks at Jakov, and the sliding grille lies across the younger man's face.*) Protect my experiences from oblivion, too...

JAKOV: And afterwards I will rest, Doctor. Rest after the nightmares and the insomnia...Rest...rest...

DOCTOR (*following Jakov out of the elevator*): My experiences and your sensibilities...Your talent...

The noise of the rain drumming against the darkened windows. The doctor takes out a fat ring of keys and attempts to open the door to the house. Jakov stands next to him, with his collar turned up. Once outside the elevator, the enchantment and excitement seem to have worn off. The doctor hands Jakov the umbrella, and then he sets to work on the lock, selecting one key after another. Jakov opens the umbrella and looks up at the ceiling bulb through the holes in the fabric. By now the doctor is on his knees in front of the keyhole.

DOCTOR (*looking up at Jakov and the umbrella*): Moths. (*Keeps trying out keys in the lock.*) This building is full of moths. Even though I set out naphthalene everywhere. Earlier I tried lavender. Nothing works.

The doctor finally manages to open the door and then gets to his feet.

JAKOV: It doesn't matter, Doctor. That one's better than nothing at all...I'll return it to you tomorrow.

DOCTOR (*conspiratorially*): I'll share with you the secret of how those Seder spirits are prepared...They say that Bayer aspirin

is unsurpassed! (*Takes Jakov's arm.*) Do you know why? Old man Bayer used to add to the well-known basic formula a few spoonsful of white powder...And he took its secret with him to the grave. He figured he was going to get as old as Methusaleh...Good night now. Good-bye.

Jakov opens the door. Teeming rain. The doctor follows him with his eyes. Darkness.

PART TWO: WINTER

VI.

The garbage dump. Pieces of furniture, iron bed-frames, ripped armchairs and couches, busted chairs, scrap metal, boards, worn-out consumer products of every sort, stoves and ovens, crates, trunks, piles of old books and newspapers. A light flashes several times on a wheelchair. It is lying on its side, and one of its wheels is turning slowly, like the blade of a windmill.

In this heap we discover, from a great height, the doctor wheezing and digging about like a rat. Then in a rapid succession of shots we see him rummaging in old books and blowing on his frozen fingers. He stacks up old books and newspapers and then ties them together with a cord. He's wearing a long winter coat, a scarf and hat, and ear-muffs that are mouse-gray in color. Knit gloves on his hands. Now and then he takes his gloves off, so that he can page through a book. He blows on his fingers. It is snowing, and a north wind is blowing. There are piles of mutilated, stripped shop-window mannequins; the wind, alternately covering and uncovering them with snow, rocks them back and forth. The mannequins are pink in color, the color of human skin. Every single one of them bears a plainly visible registration number tattooed somewhere on them. Underneath some rubbish the doctor discovers a large typewriter, a Remington, and he tugs it out of the junk. The tall old-fashioned office model resembles a cathedral. He wipes it off with his sleeve, rotates the drum, and strikes a few keys...

The display mannequins, rolling back and forth in the wind. A shot of the doctor's feet, in galoshes, with the crunching of the snow under his

feet as they are dragged through the snow. The doctor leaves the dump: a shot of his face, and a sign behind his back reading GARBAGE.

The doctor, loaded down with books. He has used string to tie them in two bundles, then bound the bundles together with wire and thrown them across his shoulders, so that each stack of books hangs over each shoulder. He carries the big office typewriter in his arms; it is covered with newspapers. He groans and huffs and puffs. The wind blows off the newspaper, already damp, that was covering the typewriter. The paper flaps in the wind, flying up into the doctor's face and blocking his vision. For a moment we have a glimpse of the clammy newspaper pages, with obituaries and photographs of the deceased. Then the wind snatches the obituary pages away and scatters them. We can hear the doctor panting, like the panting of a tired dog or an escaped camp inmate. We can see the typewriter and the back of the doctor's hands carrying it. He holds it the way benefactors hold the model of an abbey they've endowed. One of his hands is in a glove, a hand-knit glove with holes, while the other, reddish blue, swollen, and half-frozen, is stuck to the steel. The doctor's left sleeve has slid up, pulled by the sharp wire that has dug visibly into the flesh of his shoulder. Heavily laden and bent over, the doctor moves down the street and disappears in the swirling snow, accompanied by the furious barking of dogs. Fade to black.

VII.

The doctor's room. A new cot has been brought in, and the room's divided by a folding screen, a paravent, so that Jakov can work undisturbed. At present the screen, which usually functions as a room partition, is pushed to the side, and we see Jakov's bed, unmade, with his pillow and blankets all crumpled up. The desk has been moved close to Jakov's bed, and on it are several books (the ones the doctor had just brought home). Empty bottles, an ashtray full of cigarette butts. In the middle of the table the Remington typewriter is visible. The doctor lies in his bed, sick, running a temperature. Jakov is sitting at the desk, gazing out the window. The room is quiet. Then, through the wall, one can hear a baby crying somewhere close by.

JAKOV (after a short silence): There's no way that I can write by hand any more. I've gotten completely out of the habit...

DOCTOR: As far as I'm concerned, go right ahead and type. It doesn't bother me. But these people here...(*Points at the wall.*)... Well, I understand. The little child...

JAKOV: But I write best at night...

The doctor removes the thermometer from his armpit and holds it up to the light.

Doctor: 38.4...My temperature is 38.4...

JAKOV (*vacantly, eating an apple*): Doctor, did you know that Schiller, while he wrote—

DOCTOR (*interrupting him*): —sniffed rotten apples! (*Gives a forced laugh, and then starts staring at the thermometer again.*)

My temperature—38.4. (*Sticks the thermometer into its padded holder.*) And such tightness in my chest...right here...

JAKOV: Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol rewrote his manuscripts precisely eight times by hand.

Jakov crumples up the sheet of paper, and then he stands up and tosses it into the cast-iron oven. Then he stomps on an old orange crate (labeled JAFFA) and feeds the fire with its pieces, too. He covers the doctor with a blanket. Picks up a carton of dominoes and starts to set them up on the nightstand by the doctor's bed.

JAKOV (*lining up the dominoes*): And afterwards, when he had rewritten them eight times, he pitched them into the fire.

DOCTOR (*now also lining up dominoes*): I used to write, too...That was a long time ago.

JAKOV: His whole life that way...Copying it over eight times, and then—into the fire!

DOCTOR: When I was in junior high school, one of my plays got staged by an amateur club. It was about a girl who gets seduced by a local squire. Imagine that! My late father had told me about it. (*Like a parenthetical remark accompanied by a shrug.*) He too is...*gestorben*.² Auschwitz... He was a country doctor. A kind of Chekhov. Back then, Chekhov was all the rage. He jotted down experiences from his medical practice on little pieces of paper.

² German in the original. English translation: "dead".

JAKOV: I've always thought it strange when I hear of a doctor who has...fallen ill.

DOCTOR: Or who has died...

JAKOV: In my town, a doctor did die, the father of one of my school-mates. I think I was in the second or third grade. And for me it was a true source of amazement. Amazement and discovery. Since that time I've lost my faith in doctors. I simply could not grasp it: he is a doctor, and he died?

Pause. The doctor mixes up the dominoes.

DOCTOR (*contemplative, melancholic*): Do you know, Jakov, where I'd like to spend my final days?

JAKOV (*as if responding to an oft-repeated story*): I know, Doctor, I know. At the sea...Like a grizzled old sea captain...with his meerschaum pipe clenched in his teeth.

Pause. They place dominoes.

DOCTOR: I've always wondered whether we are a Mediterranean people...Whether my longing for the ocean is biologically determined...

JAKOV: Chekhov wrote at Yalta...and on Capri.

The doctor begins to suffer an attack of asthma.

DOCTOR: At any rate, I'm going to see to it that I finish my days by the sea...

The crying of a child can be heard through the wall.

JAKOV: We'll get an apartment...At least we won't have that to contend with...(Gestures with his head towards the wall.) Proust lined his room with cork and heavy drapes...

DOCTOR (*after a fresh attack of asthma*): You'll help me do it, Jakov...When your book is finished...Spending my final days on the coast...(Seizes Jakov's hand, accidentally upsetting the game of dominoes. Jakov frees his hand and starts spreading out the pieces again.) Even if it's in an old-folks' home, Jakov...(Quietly.) One time back before the war, I was at the sea. In winter. Ester was not feeling well, and the doctors recommended

ocean air for her. We were in Opatija...The weather was like ours today...wintry and cold. And you know what? For the first time in my life, I wasn't cold...Explain that to me, Jakov...The winds were blowing, it was sleeting, and everybody was full of complaints about the weather. And me...I perceived the scent of a Mediterranean summer in those cold, stormy winds. My body felt the sun even though it only appeared two or three times, at most, just to reassure us that it was there and that at any time it could start shining again. And I waited for it, Jakov, with the faith of a fanatic of the most extreme sort. I waited for it as for the Messiah who I knew to be on his way... By contrast, Jakov, here it seems every time—and it always has, since my youngest days—every time the summer is past, when autumn is here with its wind and rain, then I believe each year anew, and have for decades now, that the snow and the cold will reign forever...for all time...that the ice will never melt, the sun will never shine again, and the trees will never again be break out in green...And that year, at the sea, the almond trees bloomed in January...

JAKOV: Once they took us on an excursion from the boarding school to the beach near Herceg Novi. For two days and one night we rode in smelly rail cars, thirsty and covered in piss, our heads shorn like convicts, with a teacher who did calisthenics with us at any train station where we stopped for more than a moment. She'd get us down from the cars and line us up and then start to count in Slovene: One! Two! Three! One! Two! Three!...Two! Two! Threeeee! Fouuuuuuur! Two! Three! And the people in the compartments looked out and saw us with our hair shorn like that, wearing uniforms, as if we were little delinquents...War orphans! Something like heroes or shock workers! The passengers offered us candy, and water and sandwiches, but our instructor had taught us that dignity was worth more than anything, and that we had to harden ourselves, and thus she chased us in the early mornings across the rock-strewn landscape—at the time this was known as “warming up”—before we even ate, and in the evening, one-two-three, one-two-three, and when we were supposed to be

going to a big assembly or something, diarrhea would make us all head to the bushes. We went constantly, probably because of the greasy soup that had charred pieces of bacon floating in it, and the half-raw horsemeat, bloody and tough...(Pause.) That, Doctor, is my seaside! Diarrhea, a shaved head, sun-burn, sweat, and the runs through the boulders...and then, to top off the whole summer beach thing, a boy from Čantavir drowned in the shoals right after jumping in. That was right at the beginning of the trip, and after that they prohibited us from getting anywhere near the water. As if someone else were going to drown! And so we spent a month in those hot tents, in that grove of olive trees, and all around our food scraps were beginning to stink and everything reeked of diarrhea and the overweight cook's food and body odor, too...That's my ocean experience, my *Mediterranean*!

DOCTOR: But Jakov, those are the very things that made you into a future writer. That's what evolved your sensibilities, your talent. And, you see, that's what I was lacking. That's what left me unfruitful...Despite what I went through in the camps, despite my experience! (Pause.) For me this experience arrived too late, Jakov! Too late! By then I was already a wreck...

JAKOV (*randomly*): Doctor, why didn't you ever remarry? After your return from the camps?

DOCTOR (*as if he had not heard the question*): Yes, yes. A walking ruin...while you, Jakov...with your talent, with your strength...

An asthma attack ensues.

Then the doctor puts the dominoes back into their box. Jakov has stood up and is preparing to go out. He pulls on his shoes, ties them, puts on a shirt, etc. He's hidden behind the room divider, from behind which he emerges only occasionally to lend emphasis to his words through his presence.

JAKOV: I'll take you there, Doctor. And we'll put up a sun umbrella on the terrace.

DOCTOR: Jakov, you won't laugh at me, will you? Promise me you won't...

Pause.

JAKOV (*who comes out in front of the screen for a moment while he is buttoning his fly*): What are you talking about?

DOCTOR (*childlike, senile*): May I bring my geraniums along?

JAKOV (*behind the screen*): Don't you think there are more elegant flowers than geraniums at the sea?

DOCTOR: But I'm accustomed to them, Jakov...And Ester loved them so much...She always said: Geraniums are like people...

Yet another asthma attack. Jakov gives him the inhaler, and the doctor uses it and breathes a bit easier afterwards. Jakov sits on the bed next to him, worried. He feels the doctor's forehead, covers him up, and places his head on the pillow. The doctor closes his eyes as if he wants to go to sleep. One can hear the ticking of the alarm clock on the marble-topped nightstand. Jakov heads for the door on his tiptoes.

DOCTOR (*bolting up from his sleep*): Jakov! Jakov!

JAKOV: Sleep, Doctor, sleep. Tonight I won't do any typing. I'll be writing things out longhand.

Jakov leaves.

Darkness.

PART THREE: SPRING

VIII.

The park on the hospital grounds. Alone or in groups of two or three the patients are strolling around in pyjamas over which they wear dark-colored bathrobes. In the background, among the trees that have already turned green, one can see the gray hospital building. Two corpulent nurses, wearing dirty white smocks and orthopedic shoes, unload a heavy, steaming kettle of tin from a truck that has just arrived. The kettle's covered by a tin lid. Inside would seem to be their food. The truck is labeled as a Red Cross vehicle.

On a bench to the side, the doctor, wearing pajamas and a bathrobe, is visible. He has a beret on his head. The bathrobe is secured around his waist with a cord. Jakov is sitting next to him. He's holding a briefcase in his lap. They are conversing about something at the moment our eyes alight on them from afar, and then they stop and watch the nurses

carrying off the kettle at the end of the path. Silence. The nurses disappear through the entrance to the hospital building. The doctor and Jakov remain seated for a while longer on the bench. They do not talk. The doctor looks depressed, run down.

JAKOV: Do you need anything?

DOCTOR (*vacantly*): No. (*Pause.*) The board here is splendid. They cook with real oil. Dessert every other day. Tortes or fruit!

JAKOV: Should I bring you the dominoes?

Two orderlies in white jackets and caps walk past them through the grounds. One of them has a sterile mask of gauze around his neck; he apparently only just took it off his face. On his sleeves and chest, clearly visible, are spots of blood. They hurry along the gravel pathway in the park, wordlessly, and without looking at anyone else. When they're even with the bench on which the Doctor and Jakov are sitting, the Doctor straightens up a bit and nods to them. But they keep walking, without noticing him. Then, a little farther away, at the end of the tree-lined path, they start gesticulating as they walk and they exchange two or three words that we cannot hear. Jakov and the Doctor say nothing. An embarrassed pause.

DOCTOR: Jakov, I am scared of this operation.

JAKOV (*distractedly*): Don't worry, Doctor. Don't worry. Everything will be fine.

DOCTOR (*after a short pause, as if speaking to himself*): "Baruch dayan ha-emes...."

A patient who is missing one leg walks past on crutches.

JAKOV: What did you say?

DOCTOR (*without pathos, as if he were not responding to Jakov's question*): Blessed the righteous judge...

Pause.

DOCTOR: The operation is a very delicate one...(Pause.) And the chances are slim that...

JAKOV: Maybe it would be good if I brought you a whole year's run of some magazines. For your amusement.

It seems like the doctor isn't listening. He pulls a key ring from his pocket and works one key off of it, slowly and clumsily, with hands that are shaky and weak.

DOCTOR: I left my will for Letringer...You'll find it in the desk drawer. (*Fumbles with the ring of keys.*) Give the Jewish Council the letter I addressed to them. (*Hands him the key.*) It's all there in writing.

Pause.

Jakov sticks the key into his pocket. Then he starts rummaging through his other pockets, pulls out a piece of matzo, and begins nibbling on it.

JAKOV: A few days ago a package of matzo came for you. Should I bring it to you?

The doctor casts an envious glance at Jakov, who is still eating matzo. Suddenly his face brightens.

DOCTOR: That means they haven't written me off yet!...They still remember old Solomon Singer. (*Pause.*) How goes your work?

JAKOV (*without ardor*): It's going.

He keeps eating for a bit longer and then checks his watch.

DOCTOR: Go on, go on now...It's time.

Jakov and the doctor get to their feet and walk towards the exit. Visitors are thronging towards the gate, some of them accompanied by patients.

DOCTOR: At least now you can work...No one will bother you.

JAKOV: It seems that the Šering's baby, the youngest one, has come down with the whooping cough. She's always either coughing or crying. Around the clock...It's enough to drive you mad. (*He stops. From under a pile of old newspapers in the briefcase that, until now, he had rested in his lap or held tucked under his arm, he pulls an orange.*) I didn't think you had any newspapers in here. (*He stuffs them back into the briefcase and hands the doctor the orange.*) To wet your whistle—

DOCTOR (*holding the apple in his hand, distractedly*): Water the flowers till I get home.

Jakov waves to him and then disappears among the other visitors streaming towards the exit. The Doctor goes back and takes a seat on the same bench as earlier, lost in his thoughts, confused. In his lap he's holding an orange with the word JAFFA stamped on its peel. Listlessly he begins to peel the orange. An old man with a shaved head takes a seat next to him—but at a proper distance. This man is also wearing hospital pyjamas. They sit in silence, without looking at each other.

Fade out

IX.

The doctor, grown visibly older and more decrepit, is sitting in a wheelchair, to all appearances the same wheelchair that we saw earlier in the garbage dump. He's wrapped in a blanket and is wearing old cloth slippers on his feet. The terrace on which he's rolling around is small and dusty; it is crammed full of old junk of every type, along with flower pots—of geraniums, mostly. There are blooming geraniums everywhere—on the wide parapet of the terrace, in pots affixed to the dirty wall, as well as along the patio itself, which is divided up by screen wire. In one corner sits a banged-up pail with little pieces of left-over coal and wood, and in another corner there are wooden orange crates, bearing the label JAFFA, that doubtless have been serving as kindling. At one end of the terrace, where the first leaves of a green plant have emerged, twining up through the screen towards the spring sun, a rusty bird-cage hangs, its door ajar. Inside it can be seen bird droppings and left-over feed. The doctor is watering the flowers with the bottle that still bears the label he had long ago written out and affixed by his own hand: SEDER SPIRITS—1952. After he finishes with the flowers, the Doctor sets down the bottle for a moment and picks up a pair of scissors from the window sill. He clips off withered leaves and stems at their base. In front of him stretches a broad vista of the outlying districts of the city, with the dilapidated market stalls, the smokestack of a factory, the train station with its smoking locomotives. A sunny morning.

(This scene should be filmed in the following sequence: geraniums in bloom, the bottle that someone's hand is using to water them at the roots, and then the Doctor's head, and then the observer should be led step by step across the terrace and out over the panorama of this blue-collar outlying district of the city, with its factory chimneys and train station, and then, only at the end, do we see the doctor in his wheelchair and the

whole terrace. For a moment, the viewer should believe that Jakov's and the Doctor's daydreams from the earlier scene (VII) have come true, and that they are already on a terrace at the coast. Everything is there—even the beach umbrella and the chaise longue, although it too is all banged up and bleached out and apparently came from the dump, too; everything is there—except the sea.)

One can hear the chugging of a switching engine, the steam whistle of another locomotive, and the shouts of children in the courtyards. Jakov has carried the desk out onto the balcony and put it in the shade of the morning glory vines, and now he is sitting next to the doctor. On the table stand the REMINGTON typewriter and some books, but most of the surface has been turned into an eating space, at least provisionally. Jakov has spread newspaper across the empty part of the desk, and at this moment he is opening up some canned fish. He is utterly engrossed in that task. He has already opened a bottle of beer and he's drinking from it, all the while fiddling around with the tin of fish. Next to the table we see empty beer bottles that have no doubt been drained by Jakov, who his now sweating profusely and wiping his face with a handkerchief. Jakov is wearing a rumpled undershirt, and he appears bedraggled, bent, bloated, unshaven, with bags under his eyes; he too is visibly older; and his sideburns are matted. He's developed a small potbelly and wrinkles are now etched deeply into his forehead and around his eyes. Jakov stretches while leaning on the parapet, looking over the sunlit roofs.

DOCTOR: ...like people. That's what Ester always said: Geraniums are like people. (*He's holding a few faded geranium blooms between his fingers.*) So similar, and so different. In terms of their appearance and their...character.

Jakov picks up the scissors that the doctor earlier put on the crate with the flowers.

JAKOV: Soon I'll be able to work on the terrace. In a month or two. As soon as that morning glory provides cover...

DOCTOR (*still holding the blossoms in his hand, preoccupied*): "In terms of their appearance and their character." That's what she said.

Jakov is clipping the nails on his left hand.

JAKOV: You look good today, Doctor...That means that the medicine Dr. Prohaska gave you is helping...

DOCTOR (*merrily*): It's spring, my friend! Spring! I'm like a geranium...In every sense. But I prefer sunny days.

JAKOV: And I work best in the fall. In early fall...Spring makes me uneasy...

DOCTOR: Dr. Prohaska claims that my asthma has turned the corner. (*With irony.*) The Lord has arranged things for the best. (*Bends over the side of his wheelchair to continue watering flowers.*) He improves things with your lungs a little but takes your legs in exchange...And leaves your heart damaged...(*Abjectly.*) Not to mention the bedsores.

JAKOV (*still trimming his fingernails*): He said the sea would help... Even with the bedsores.

The doctor lowers his bottle, makes as if to say something, decides not to, and then abruptly rolls towards Jakov. He takes the scissors out of Jakov's hands and starts cutting the nails on the other man's right hand. Jakov acquiesces, like a child, without so much as a word.

DOCTOR: My dear colleague—as he said—I am full of optimism. By next spring everything will be back to normal. You will be able to walk once more...He—and I mean Prohaska here—said that this is all the result of...of the injury... (*He speeds up the rest of the sentence.*)...that I suffered in the camp...during that bombardment...(*He pauses briefly in his nail-clipping for Jakov.*) At that time I sustained an injury to my spine. And till now, you see, it's been in remission. That's how he sees it anyway...Relapse. (*Pause.*) The Lord has arranged everything for the best...In one spot He gives; in another He takes.

JAKOV: What happened exactly? To your spine?

DOCTOR (*after some hesitation*): I've told you already. While we were fleeing... Anyway, it's not important anymore.

JAKOV: It's important to me! To me every detail counts, every fact that can serve as...as a stimulus...

DOCTOR: But you've already written this down. (*Pause.*) And incidentally...(*stops unexpectedly*).

Pause.

JAKOV (*pensively*): Do you know, Doctor, what I need?

The doctor does not answer. He's preoccupied with Jakov's fingernails.

JAKOV: Somewhere I read about how Thomas Wolfe used to work.

You see, he had this trunk, a crate...made of wood. And he threw his manuscripts into it, stack after stack, year after year. Then one fine day a publisher drops in to visit him unannounced...It was one of the big guys. And he asks him, he asks Thomas Wolfe that is, what he'd been writing. "Nothing, sir," Wolfe says. "Say what? You've written nothing?" the publisher asks. "That's right. Nothing," says Wolfe. Then the publisher wonders out loud what's in the trunk there next to the desk. "My manuscripts," responds Wolfe. "For ten years now I've been tossing my manuscripts in there. My garbage! This chest, my good sir, is full of pages I've filled up, and on that paper is the largest part of my existence...(Jakov waits for the whistling of a locomotive to cease.) It's the attempt to depict all of America...Everything that I have heard or seen in my life, and all that others have heard and seen in this great new country! The cumulative experiences of all peoples and races. (Pause.) And all that, good sir, is pure, garden-variety pulp. Wasted, useless paper."

The doctor has finished trimming Jakov's fingernails; Jakov gets to his feet, looks around the terrace.

JAKOV: So the publisher says to Wolfe that he'd still like to see it...Just in case. Just to put his mind at ease. Or maybe it was simply for the sake of curiosity. Or some such thing. "Be my guest," says Wolfe, "but you're just wasting your valuable time. I tell you, it's only messy nonsense, lost and useless days, nights squandered with no point, my youth, wasted." (Pause.) He picked up the chest "the publisher, that is" and hauled it off, put all the pages of the manuscripts in order, read them, and went back to see the author a few weeks later...(Pause.) He took him a contract. And he told him: "Mr. Wolfe, you've written a work of genius! (Pause. Jakov turns to the doctor.) That's all I wanted to say. The end.

The doctor, who had been listening attentively to him this whole time, turns back to his geraniums without further ado. He starts watering them and weeding their pots.

DOCTOR (*without raising his eyes from his flowers*): Why don't you get married?

JAKOV: (*gives a powerful start, and then turns to look at the doctor*): I have more important things to do with my life, Doctor. Much more important things, if you care to know.

Awkward pause. The rattle of a switching engine on the tracks.

DOCTOR: If I remember right, you once said you had lost faith in doctors. It was after you had come to the realization that they're mortal. Or something like that.

JAKOV (*brusquely*): You no longer believe in me...In my book. That's what you're trying to say!

DOCTOR (*turns to face Jakov*): It's me that I no longer have faith in, Jakov. In my life!

Jakov, now standing behind the doctor, grabs the wheelchair by its handles and spins it roughly around. They look each other in the eyes for a few moments, and then Jakov straightens his back, strides over to the edge of the terrace, and looks out at the train station. One can hear train whistles, long and drawn out, like a lament.

JAKOV: You don't believe in me! (*Pause.*) And don't think that I feel a debt of guilt to anyone. Don't even think that! I washed dishes in that cafeteria for long enough. For long enough...I— (*Breaks off.*) And I don't give a rat's ass what you think! Do you understand? It doesn't matter to me.

DOCTOR (*after a brief silence, facing Jakov*): I didn't say anything, Jakov. Nothing. (*Goes back to his flowers.*)

JAKOV (*irritated*): I devoted the best years of my life to this book... To the idea of it, if you will...And I've had enough of your recriminations...of your sterile patronage.

DOCTOR: Jakov!

Now Jakov has grabbed the wheelchair and, enraged, is pushing the doctor back and forth across the balcony, in a kind of impotent fury. The doctor gets dizzy. The entire terrace spins, complete with the birdcage and the roofs of the surrounding houses. The wheelchair, in need of lubrication, squeaks.

JAKOV: If I had not taken care of you, if for years running I had not brought up the coal to your place and fetched you your bed-pan as if you were an infant, if I hadn't listened to all your hare-brained stories that did nothing but shatter my concentration...yes, wreck my concentration...then I would have had this book finished by now... *(Pause. The doctor is clutching the armrests of his wheelchair tightly and looks stunned by Jakov's rage; Jakov grows quieter.)* I'm leaving, doctor. You'll see. And I mean right away...I've got friends! I'll find somebody who has faith in me. Somebody who doesn't find it too difficult to wait till my hour comes.

He hurries into the room. Along the way he gives the cat a kick and then sets about packing his suitcase by just hurling clothes into it. From time to time he reappears in the doorway to emphasize a certain sentence.

JAKOV: I will write this book of mine...Even without those stupid witnesses of yours, and all your feeble-minded camp inmates. *(Screaming.)* And what the hell am I supposed to make of your senile friend Letringer? And with those silly séances of yours in your camp outfits, as if you were ghosts. *(He appears in the doorway again.)* And don't think that I could've been taken in by your featherbrained stories. Don't even go there...Letringer told me everything....everything!

Jakov slams the door and leaves with his suitcase. The doctor remains alone on the balcony, desperately alone, his head in his hands. His whole body is shaking, and he is racked by terrible sobs. And then by an asthma attack. When he opens his eyes again he sees Jakov crouching by an upended flower pot, from which a snapped-off geranium has tumbled, along with some dirt. Jakov collects the dirt with his bare hands and puts it back in the pot after he rights it.

We see the handful of earth that Jakov throws into the flower pot land on the roots of the broken flower.

Fade out.

PART FOUR: SUMMER

X.

The clock on the bedside table shows noon. The doctor is sitting in his wheelchair at the window. The heavy drapes are pulled back a bit, and through the opening tilted beams of summer sunshine stream in. They strike the doctor's newspaper.

On the balcony, viewed from the lateral perspective of the doctor, we see Jakov lying in a deck chair. He is naked to the waist and is getting a suntan. He swigs a bottle of beer. The doorbell rings. The doctor lays the paper in his lap and propels himself rapidly over to the door like someone expecting a visitor. He opens up. Jakov places the bottle of beer he has just finished drinking down on the floor.

JAKOV (calling out): Who's there? (Listens hard for a reply.) Doctor, who is it?

The doctor, seated in his wheelchair, is holding a large wooden trunk in his lap. The trunk is similar to military footlockers of earlier days, with its curved top, but it's about twice as large. It is not new. We can see the doctor's head peeking up above the lid. He has pressed his beard into the top and is using his hands to turn the wheels of his chair. At the moment the doctor closes the door with a single deft motion, we can see behind him the working-class man who brought the trunk and who is now going down the stairs. He's a colossus with a shaved head.

JAKOV (off): Who was that?

The doctor and the chest have now reached the middle of the room. Jakov is peering from the sun-drenched balcony into the semi-darkness of the room, and he sees only the doctor's head, jutting up behind the chest. Jakov grudgingly stands up from the chaise longue, lifts the chest from the doctor's lap, and places it next to the desk, on the left side. Then he reconsiders

and pushes it over to the right. He bends down and then kneels next to the chest. Like a child examining his toys, he opens and shuts the lid.

DOCTOR (*strutting around him in his chair*): Nobody wants to work in this heat. (*Wipes the sweat from his brow and neck with a handkerchief.*) I could scarcely find anyone to deliver it.

JAKOV (*slaps the lid with his open hand, and checks the quality of the wood by tapping on it*): No wonder...Schlepping stuff around in this heat. (*Keeps knocking on the chest.*)

DOCTOR: Does it suit you?

JAKOV: It's good. (*Knocks.*) A lot of room inside...(Pause.) Only... (*Puts his ear up to the chest.*)

DOCTOR: Maybe it needs a new coat of paint...

JAKOV: I think it's got moths.

DOCTOR (*dumbfounded*): Moths?

JAKOV: Doctor, I don't want my manuscripts exposed to the deleterious effects of those insects.

Jakov gets to his feet, wipes the dust from his knees, and goes into the kitchen. The doctor leans down over the chest, knocking on it and holding his ear to the lid; he opens it and closes it. Jakov comes back from the kitchen with a bottle of beer.

JAKOV (*opening the beer*): I definitely don't want it, Doctor.

He goes out onto the balcony and sits down again in the chaise longue. Drinks beer from the bottle. Makes himself comfortable, closes his eyes, and abandons himself to the sun.

JAKOV: No way, Doctor. Definitely not!

Fade out.

XI.

Jakov and the Doctor are standing in front of the elevator. The doctor's condition has deteriorated considerably and he is even more unkempt in appearance. He's wearing pyjamas that are falling apart. Jakov has also grown visibly older, but he's just gotten fatter and looks bloated. He's

wearing an undershirt. The doctor is now a bit senile and has lost his earlier vivaciousness. He's sitting helplessly in the wheelchair, directly in front of the elevator doors. In his lap he's holding a scratched, empty washbowl. Jakov has summoned the elevator, and we can hear it coming from somewhere, clacking and squeaking. Jakov is holding a large enamel watering can in his hand, with a capacity of 3-5 liters. It too is scratched up. Jakov opens the doors to the elevator and then rudely shoves the doctor in along with his wheelchair. Now the doctor is in front of the mirror, with his back to the elevator door. He is looking closely at his face, like an idiot. Jakov enters (we see it in the mirror), shuts the doors, sets down the can, and fusses with the handle that sets the elevator in motion. It starts to move, banging and squeaking. (The elevator's descent may be made to last longer than it would in real life.)

DOCTOR (*senile and childlike*): Why does Letringer not come by?

Jakov makes no response.

DOCTOR: It's been three months since I saw him. At least. (*Trying to remember.*) Longer than that...Since my operation...

Jakov does not reply.

The doctor, in his wheelchair, tries to turn to face Jakov in the narrow elevator. But his strenuous efforts are in vain. Jakov is holding the handles so tightly that the doctor gives up and goes back to looking in the mirror. The water in the container is steaming, and the mirrors are opaque and covered in condensation.

DOCTOR (*sternly*): Why doesn't Letringer look in on us?

JAKOV (*apparently tipsy*): I told him not to come over anymore.

DOCTOR (*with a certain senile laugh*): As fat as he is, how can he stand this heat? (*Wipes away his sweat, and then, as if he were just now recognizing the meaning of Jakov's words, he cringes.*)

You told him not to come any more?

JAKOV (*coldly*): Yes.

The doctor attempts, as he did just a moment earlier, to turn his chair around, but Jakov prevents it. They are going down, without speaking. The doctor, closely regarding his face in the mirror, seems to think he'll

find there, on his own face, the answer to the question: "Why doesn't Letringer come?"

JAKOV (*unprompted*): All he does is bother me...and you, too.

The doctor does not respond. He's goggling at his face in the mirror.

JAKOV: I know all your stories by heart! All of them!

Pause.

JAKOV: What good are they to my book? Tell me that! What use?

(*Pause.*) All he ever talks about is hunger and food. As if he had just gotten out of the camp yesterday...(*Pause.*) And then he'll burp and tell the same story again...

The elevator halts with a lurch, as if it had crashed. Jakov opens the doors, goes out first, and takes the watering can, setting it down on the ground outside. Then he grabs the handles of the wheelchair and man-handles it out of the elevator. Pushes him through the cool corridor to the entrance to the courtyard, which is roughly 10 m x 10 m in size, a box-like area—a lightwell between the buildings, which have their blind walls turned towards the courtyard, walls from which the plaster has fallen and on which here and there you can still see traces of shells from the last war. This scene takes place at noon on a hot day in July, and everything is awash with harsh, bright light. On one side of the courtyard is a half-ruined wall, above which we can see a garden grown over with weeds. In the courtyard that Jakov and the doctor enter, there is nothing but weeds that have shot up in the corners. Close to the half-ruined wall are a crossbar and frame in the shape of the Cyrillic letter π. It's built of pipe and would appear to be there for carpet-cleaning. The scene between Jakov and the doctor is being observed by a man at a small window, apparently the only window in the adjacent walls. He's standing the whole time at the little window (presumably in a bathroom), with only his shaved head protruding. He seems utterly indifferent to what is going on below, and his face betrays nothing, neither amazement nor curiosity. Since Jakov is continually turning the doctor around, the mysterious witness appears at various angles: from below, frontally, from the side. Jakov has pushed the wheelchair over the bumpy courtyard to the sunny side. This square of sunlight creates its own little world in the lightwell,

a fully separate environment... Jakov puts down the enamel container next to the wheelchair, takes the dented bowl out of the doctor's lap, and places it right in front of his feet. He fills it with warm water, still steaming, from the can. A few walnut leaves flow into the bowl as the water's going in, and they have imparted to the water a brown appearance, like dark beer. The doctor looks on vacuously, his eyes riveted somewhere beyond Jakov's face. His head doesn't change position as Jakov strips off his socks and places his feet in the bowl of water.

JAKOV (*while pouring water*): Yeah, yeah. Always the same old story...How dear old mama had just served him up a piece of apple pie when they showed up to get him, and how he suffered the whole time in the camp because of those *apfelstrudels* of his...(Pulls several more of the walnut leaves out of the can, and we see they have turned his fingertips yellow, as if from nicotine.) And all the time he's sitting there eating goulash and wolfing down entire chickens...

The doctor does not answer. He looks mutely at the wall.

JAKOV: I was over at his place recently.

The doctor appears to flinch slightly.

JAKOV: He's panting like a pig these days...And he's getting ready to go to the coast.

Again the doctor does not answer.

Jakov is covered in sweat. He wipes his neck and face with a handkerchief and then pulls out of the baggage net on the wheelchair a bottle of beer, which he drains in long, thirsty gulps. He's about to pitch the bottle into a corner of the courtyard. Then the hand holding the bottle stops: Jakov has spotted the shaved head of the man in the window. He walks over to the corner and places the bottle next to the wall. Comes back and begins to massage the doctor's feet and to whip them with walnut branches.

DOCTOR (*gaping into the void*): I think it would be best if you went with him.

Jakov gives a start.

JAKOV: What did you say?

DOCTOR: I think the best thing would be for you to go with him.

JAKOV: I have a job to do.

DOCTOR: You don't need to worry about me. The Šerings' little girl can help me out. I'm teaching her German and what not. Once she brought me an orange. To wet my whistle, she said.

Jakov retreats into the shade and sits down on a rock near the carpet rack. He opens up a new bottle.

JAKOV (*drinking from the bottle*): We talked about you.

DOCTOR (*as if he had not heard him, and letting the newspaper fall into his lap*): It feels like ants are running through my left leg. (*Gushing with enthusiasm.*) Jakov, it seems like the walnut leaves are helping...And don't think this is quackery! The chemical composition of walnut leaves enables—

JAKOV: You told me that last year, too: Jakov, ants are running through my left leg.

DOCTOR: I should have a footbath more often...Does me good.

JAKOV: Twice a week. Isn't twice a week good enough?

The doctor looks at his feet.

DOCTOR (*enthusiastically*): Jakov, it seems to me that the big toe on my left foot just moved.

Jakov rises to his feet, and he glances towards the man in the window. Then he walks over to the doctor and looks down at his feet.

DOCTOR: See? Do you see it?

JAKOV: I don't see anything.

DOCTOR: But the big toe on my left foot moved. Just a tiny bit, but it did move...That has to be a good sign, right, Jakov?

Jakov is crouching by the washbowl. Then he picks up one of the branches from which the leaves have been plucked, pulls out his pocket-knife, and starts to sharpen the end of it.

JAKOV: We'll just see about that.

DOCTOR (*frightened*): Maybe it's still too early for that, Jakov.

JAKOV (*imperiously*): Turn around!

DOCTOR: Maybe we should wait another month for that. Until the whole regimen is complete.

JAKOV (*imperiously*): Turn around!

Scared, the doctor turns his head, and his eyes meet those of the man in the window. Jakov pokes the Doctor in the heel with the sharpened stick, hard, but the doctor does not react.

DOCTOR: I'm afraid, Jakov.

JAKOV: All right...Let's wait and do this some other time.

He stands up and tosses away the sharpened stick. He goes over to the bar on the carpet-rack, sizes it up, and then wraps both hands around it. He flexes his muscles as if he were about to do a pull-up.

JAKOV: In the home for war orphans, I was number one on the parallel bars. Yes, yes, Doctor, I was! In a competition that was held as part of a big youth gathering, I got second place. Do you understand? Second place. Right behind a Slovene. And third on the rings.

He lets go of the bar, goes back to the wheelchair, pulls a bottle of beer out of the baggage net and takes a seat on the rock.

JAKOV: And today? Look at me.

The doctor won't look at him. He's staring wide-eyed at his newspaper.

JAKOV (*aggravated*): Yes, yes, Doctor. Me—personally! (*Dispirited.*) Second on the bars, and third on the rings. (*Drinks the beer.*)

DOCTOR (*reading from the newspaper*): Bedsit, shared with my daughter, to rent...Listen to how that sounds: I'll renting you a bedsit that my daughter can share with a student or young woman office worker.

JAKOV: We talked about you.

DOCTOR (*reading aloud*): Young office worker with minor physical handicap...(*Senses Jakov's eyes on him, halts.*) You and Letringer? What did you say about me?

JAKOV (*takes a gulp from the bottle*): Nothing.

Pause.

DOCTOR (*insistently*): What did he say about me?

Jakov has stood up now and goes over to the doctor. He picks him up forcefully, straining as he does so. The washbowl tips over. At first the doctor does not grasp what is happening, but then he yields to Jakov and clings to his neck.

JAKOV: You need to do something for your circulation.

DOCTOR: What did he say about me?

Jakov hauls him across the courtyard. The doctor's legs are completely lifeless, and his feet, colored up to the ankles by the walnut branches, scrape helplessly through the dirt.

JAKOV (*panting*): Nothing. He didn't say anything to me.

DOCTOR: Did he tell you?—Jakov, I'm about to fall—Did he tell you how I lost my legs?

Without a word, and out of breath and tipsy, Jakov carries him. At a certain moment, his eyes and those of the man in the window meet. Jakov stands still for a brief while.

JAKOV: He told me something...I don't remember what. (*Starts to drag him farther.*)

DOCTOR: That's as good as saying he told you! (*Agitated.*) Did he tell you about Sara?

JAKOV (*gasping for breath, stopping all of a sudden*): Sara who?

DOCTOR (*gasping for breath*): Don't pretend. Surely he told you about Sara.

Jakov drags him some more, increasing his tempo and still not talking.

DOCTOR (*pulling at his hair*): He told you about it...(*As if to himself.*) Schweine! Schweine!

JAKOV (*maliciously, grimacing with pain*): I'm not interested! Do you get it? I don't care!

The doctor has again abandoned himself to Jakov. He offers no further resistance and is holding onto Jakov's neck to keep from falling.

DOCTOR: But it ought to interest you.

Jakov stops unexpectedly and leans the doctor against the wall, in order to hear him better. He keeps the doctor propped up.

JAKOV: I don't know what to make of you.

DOCTOR (*gasping for breath, sweaty*): Yes, Jakov, you actually should care about this...You of all people. My story about Sara.

JAKOV (*conciliatory*): What do you mean? Is there a connection... to my book, perhaps?

DOCTOR (*disdainfully*): Yes! A connection to *your book*.

JAKOV: I don't see what it is...(*Picks him up and starts hauling him again.*) Between your marriage to Sarah and my book...?

Now the doctor has discovered the man in the window, too, and moves his head close to Jakov's ear.

DOCTOR: Between your book and my infertility! That's it. That's the connection. (*Screaming.*) That is the connection!

Once more Jakov stops in his tracks. He's within an arm's length of the carpet-rack, and he tugs the doctor underneath it. Both of them stand there, out of breath. Jakov leans on one of the posts and the doctor holds on to a post with one hand and Jakov with the other.

JAKOV: I'll tell you what I did not tell you last time, Doctor. You are a failure. And it's not my fault. (*Screaming.*) It's not my fault!...He told me. Yes, he told me everything. You're not a doctor at all!

DOCTOR (*in desperation*): Schweine! Schweine!

JAKOV: You never even completed your studies. You are an anesthesiologist! It was not until you were in the camp that you became a real physician. (*Pause.*) And incidentally I knew this earlier anyway...Don't think that Letringer had to be the one to tell me. I knew it earlier. From the very beginning.

DOCTOR (*uncertainly, gaping into space*): Schweine! Schweine!

Jakov yanks the doctor's arm from around his neck and leaves the other man leaning against the post of the carpet rack. He goes to the wheelchair, finds another bottle, and opens it, slowly. He is clumsy and nervous. The doctor is outraged. He is holding onto the post with both hands as if he were a martyr at the stake. When he realizes that Jakov is about to abandon him, he cries out.

DOCTOR: Jakov! Jakov!

JAKOV (*busy with the bottle*): The same way I knew what was going on with your spine.

DOCTOR: Jakov!

Pause.

The doctor is now using the crossbar to hold himself up; he has clasped it in both arms. Jakov, with the bottle of beer in his hand, walks towards the doctor, but stops three or four steps away.

DOCTOR (*quietly, as if making a confession, as if remembering, while from time to time he looks up at the mysterious, unknown observer*):

They told us we were being taken to a medical examination... They even gave us these yellow index cards with personal information. Age, familial status, number of children...And then we got in this line in front of a counter, where we turned in the cards...and they checked over our personal data...It took ten minutes, maybe twenty. (*Pause.*) They were oddly nice to us. (*Looks up at the man in the window.*) Terribly nice...It scared me. Those smiles and that kindness. (*Pause. As if he were speaking to the man in the window, although he is a long way off and cannot hear.*) While from underneath, at groin level, they were irradiating us. (*Pause.*) Mass sterilization. Did he tell you that, too?

Jakov makes no reply. He takes a slug from the bottle.

DOCTOR: And then, after all that, when I came back home and realized what they had done to us...Do you know what I'm trying to say? ...Then I tried to determine, Jakov, if everything could be started over... (*Looks at the man in the window.*) And as you see, it didn't work... (*Pause.*) Two years later I divorced Sara. (*Pause.*) She emigrated to America...Ten years ago, she passed away...Her too.

The doctor gives Jakov a helpless look, in the expectation now that he, after this confession, will rescue him from the martyr's stake.

DOCTOR: Jakov, push the wheelchair over to me.

Jakov doesn't answer. He's urinating on the wall.

DOCTOR (*maliciously*): But I did not sacrifice my life voluntarily, or in vain—and I didn't throw it away on nonsense. That's right, on nonsense...as you did!

Jakov has a threatening look on his face as he approaches the doctor again. His eyes are bloodshot and he is already rather drunk.

JAKOV (*handing him the bottle*): Herr Doktor, wünschen Sie ein Bier?³

DOCTOR (*shocked*): You're drunk!

Jakov goes over to the overturned washbowl, turns it right-side up with his foot, and, holding the bottle up high, pours the rest of the beer into it.

JAKOV: Pssssh! Pssssh! (*Turns to the doctor.*) Would Herr Doctor like me to give him his little dick back? (*Sticks the neck of the bottle into the fly on the doctor's trousers.*) Psssh! Psssh!

DOCTOR (*outraged*): Jakov, you are drunk! Drunk!

Jakov looks up and his eyes meet those of the man in the window. He puts down the bottle, lurches into position, lifts the doctor up and starts to drag him back to the wheelchair, gasping for breath.

DOCTOR: No matter, Jakov. It's all right.

JAKOV (*halts, whining*): I will finish my book, Doctor! I'll finish...

You'll see! (*Carrying him again.*) You'll see. You'll see!

DOCTOR: Calm down, Jakov...This heat makes people excitable. Nervous.

JAKOV (*tearful*): Doctor, do you have faith in my book? Do you believe in it?

DOCTOR: The heat raises people's blood pressure...And also you've had a bit too much to drink.

JAKOV (*belligerently*): You didn't answer my question.

DOCTOR: What question?

JAKOV: About whether you believe in my book.

Having reached the wheelchair, Jakov dumps the doctor unceremoniously into its seat, and then, crouching in front of him by his feet, he puts the doctor's socks back on.

³ German in the original. English translation: "Doctor, would you like a beer?"

JAKOV: Yes or no?

DOCTOR (*senile*): What book?

Jakov grabs the book on cake decorating that is in the baggage net.

JAKOV: What book? This one? (*Opens it to a random page and starts reading aloud.*) "*Sind Vögel und Tiere überhaupt noch modern also Butterkremverzierung? Man muss...*"⁴

DOCTOR: *Schweine!* (*Tries to wrest the book away from him.*) Put that down!

JAKOV: "For my sweet little girl—"

DOCTOR: *Schweine! Schweine!*

JAKOV: "—Mirjam Singer...translated by Medical Reserve Corps Captain, Prisoner # 65,10....Oflag B, Block 5, Barracks—"

The doctor bellows like an animal and sits up in the wheelchair, using every ounce of remaining strength in his muscles to try to rip the book out of Jakov's hands. In a moment of negligence on Jakov's part, he is able to grab it but then he falls out of the wheelchair and hits the ground. He is at Jakov's feet, with his face in the puddle of dirty water that had run out of the washbowl; it is coloring his face dark, like earth. He is clutching the book to his chest and breathing with a rattle. Tenderly, and fearfully, Jakov lifts the doctor's head and rests it across his knees.

The wheel of the overturned wheelchair continues to spin, with its nickel-plated spokes gleaming in the sun. The man in the window observes them with no emotion on his face.

Darkness.

XII.

Outside it is infernally hot. It's a summer day, but no sun makes it into the sick man's room, because the heavy drapes in front of the window are pulled shut. They are old and dusty, and they reek of tobacco and mustiness. The doctor is lying in bed with his head supported by a pillow, and his Adam's apple is protruding like that of a corpse. Jakov puts the old album on the record player and then takes a seat on the wobbly stool, close by the

⁴ German in the original. English translation: "Are birds and animals at all modern anymore as decorations on butter cream? One has to..."

doctor's head. The shirt Jakov is wearing is full of holes, and he is sweating and his eyes are puffy from the sleepless night and the alcohol. The nightstand is cluttered with medicine bottles, glasses, leftover food, orange peels, squeezed lemons. The doctor opens his eyes, and his gaze settles on Jakov.

DOCTOR (*as if he were continuing a story begun earlier; he is feverish and distracted by asthma attacks; the lucidity that precedes death*): Nothing, Jakov there's nothing preventing me from leaving...Nothing. (*Pause.*) Ester and Mirjam...They are very far away...With no grave or sign. Without urn or ashes...

Up to this point the record had turned silently. From another direction we now hear accompaniment for the Doctor's words, the nasal voice of a rabbi singing the song for peace of the souls of the dead. This voice, more prominent in the pauses, accompanies the doctor's discourse until the end.

Jakov is sitting on the bed, motionless, his fist crumpling the bedspread under which the doctor lies; from time to time he moistens the doctor's forehead and hands him a glass of water, as you would do for a dying man.

DOCTOR: Do you know what I used to think about, all those years ago...when I learned in the camp, that they were (*he used the German word as ever, after a slight hesitation.*) gestorben... (*Pause.*) I thought about how I carry their souls in me. (*Pause.*) In the autumn, during the foggy, agonizing days, when the clouds in the sky closed in on us and hung leaden and heavy above our heads...and while we were walking to the quarries and mines...the black smoke rose from the crematorium like volcanic ash, and it seemed to us that it was falling back down upon us, and that we were breathing it in, together with the stink...(*Pause.*) I breathed it in by the lungful, Jakov, passionately, pathologically, like a madman, because I knew that my lungs would be their only grave. (*He is shaken and suffers another bout of asthma. Jakov gives him the inhaler and the doctor sprays it into his mouth.*) And I breathed them deep inside me, their souls and their dust...(Now he seems to be ablaze with light, his eyes gleaming avidly.) Jakov, I am their grave, these ailing, asthmatic lungs of mine, full not only of smoke and coal dust but also of powder from stone and lead and zinc and

pyrite...My lungs are their urns, their tombstones...Here they lie, Jakov, here... (*In his fevered state he bares his breast by opening his rumpled striped pyjamas that look like a prisoner's outfit. He plucks at the gray hair on his emaciated chest.*) Here is their grave marker...And it, too, as you can see, is decaying. Falling apart...

He calms down. A pause.

DOCTOR: In the last few years that has been my only wish: to be buried by the sea...At Opatija...Or anywhere like that...For someone to bury us. All of us. (*Points to his chest.*)...Ester... Mirjam...and me. (*Pause.*) And how little it matters, ultimately, Jakov, where a person lies...where he or she rots. Especially when there's nobody to visit the grave.

Pause.

DOCTOR (*composed*): In any case, we'll all three be in the same place...In the same grave...(His voice almost sounds official, after he uses the inhaler once more.) The will that I left, in care of Letringer, contains my final wish. See to it that Rabbi Blamovic doesn't create any difficulties regarding cremation. It's written down plain as day: on the urn with my ashes they should put three names. And next to each name, the dates... (*His voice trails off again.*) Because, Jakov, they are here, their souls are inside me, I inhaled their dust for evermore. (*Pause.*) And together we will rest...Mixed together.

Pause. Jakov is dumbfounded. He is shaking and even his lips are twitching, but he is incapable of crying. He doesn't know what to do. He picks up a little bottle of medicine from the table, then a second one, and finally the inhaler with the asthma medicine, which he drops immediately when he is interrupted by the doctor's voice.

DOCTOR: You know Blamovic. He shouldn't be allowed to cause any problems...One urn—three names.

Jakov lifts up the doctor's head and gives him a glass of water to drink.

DOCTOR: Open the drapes, Jakov.

Jakov hurries to the window and tears down the curtains along with their wooden rod, all of which hits the floor with a great racket. The brilliant light of a hot July noon bursts into the room, and tiny particles of dust begin to circulate. Jakov turns to the doctor, who is lying there with his mouth and eyes open. Blood and vomit have begun gushing from his mouth, spilling out over his body and his bedclothes.

Darkness.

PART FIVE: AUTUMN

XIII.

It's 2 a.m. on the clock on the bedside table. Jakov is sitting at the desk. A blank sheet of paper is in the typewriter. The sheet is lit up by the yellow light coming from under the shade of the desk lamp. The room has changed a fair amount since the death of the doctor. The room divider is folded up, and one of the beds has been discarded, but the general impression of disarray and neglect is even greater. The desk is loaded with books as well as unwashed dishes, a džezva, and empty food wrappers and packages. Next to the desk are empty beer bottles. The wooden trunk is still at its old post, also next to the desk but on the right side. The menorah stands on the trunk, its last candle now burning down.

The flickering of the candle and the sizzling of the expiring flame are audible. Jakov stares, his face utterly devoid of expression, at the blank paper. Outside one can hear the drumming of the autumn rain. When the last candle on the menorah goes out, Jakov gets to his feet. He puts the menorah back in its former spot and then opens the trunk. Retrieves a crumpled sheet of paper from the empty chest, smooths it out with the palm of his hand, tosses it back into the chest. Then he slams the lid furiously and turns back to the table. All of a sudden he rests his head on the keys, his clenched fists stretched out on both sides of the typewriter. The keys rise to meet the paper. He sobs. His body shakes. The ticking of the alarm clock on the nightstand grows louder and louder, and this sound gradually transforms into the beating of a human heart.

Fade to black.

PART SIX: WINTER

XIV.

In the Jewish cemetery. The urn with the doctor's remains stands in the path with blowing snow. Under the snowdrift, we can just make out these words:

SOLOMON SINGER

1909-1972

Jakov is standing there in front of the urn, in the crunchy snow, tired, aging, bloated; he's wrapped up in a scarf and bent over like an old man. The gloves he's wearing are full of holes. The hat on his head is pulled down over his ears. He has mouse-gray earmuffs on, and galoshes over his shoes. The wind is blowing, sweeping snow over the urns and graves.

JAKOV (*under his breath, into the wind*): Forgive me, Doctor. I haven't visited you in a long time. (*Raises his eyes.*) A long time. I've been thinking...about you...and me. About us. Our people's languorous longing, Doctor.

He stands there for a while with his head bowed, and then turns and takes out a soiled piece of paper from his briefcase. It is folded two or three times.

JAKOV: But I kept my promise, Dr. Solomon Singer. (*Unfolds the paper.*) I wrote a dedication! Because the book, Doctor, is going to be dedicated to you...You'll see! (*Reads and is visibly moved by what he's written. His voice quakes, even though he knows the text by heart.*) This book I dedicate to the blessed memory of my mother, who turned into a pillar of salt, like Lot's wife...to my little sister, who went away in innocence, without turning around, and to my father...

The camera is on the urn with the name Solomon Singer.

JAKOV (*off camera. His voice has changed, because he is no longer reading*): You, Doctor, were my only father...(Now reading again from his paper.) And to the bright shadows of Dr. Solomon Singer, Captain First Class in the Medical Reserve Corps, and Prisoner of War number 6510...

Intonation of the hymn of a rabbi with the memorial prayer, for the peace of the souls of the dead, and this voice will accompany Jakov's words until the end of the play.

JAKOV: And also to the shadows of his wife, Ester, and his daughter Mirjam...who rest together with him in the same urn, mingled for eternity...

Jakov folds up the paper with his stiff, frozen fingers, sticks it back into his wallet, and speaks the rest of the dedication from memory.

JAKOV: *Baruch dayan ha-emes...*As you would have said. Blessed is the righteous judge.

Once again he raises his head. The rabbi's voice echoes in his mind. Then he walks away. We hear his steps crunching in the snow and watch as he withdraws into past the grave markers and over the wide entrance drive of the cemetery, towards the distant horizon; the wind shakes the heavy steel fence on the far-off gate, causing it to squeak. Jakov is followed by the ever louder voice of the rabbi singing the memorial prayer.⁵

THE END

⁵ Kiš never identifies the prayers to which he refers in this play, though there is a certain amount of description of their content and function. Whether, for instance, the memorial prayer that the author mentions is more likely the Mourner's Kaddish, Yizkor, or El Male Rachamim, is unknown.

THE MECHANICAL LIONS

(A TOMB FOR BORIS DAVIDOVIČ)

a drama in nineteen scenes with a false epilogue



CHARACTERS

BORIS DAVIDOVIČ NOVSKI

FEDJUKIN, PROSECUTOR

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MAJSNER

NASTASJA FEDOTJEVNA M.

ENGINEER BUTENKO

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO

NATALIJA SERGEJEVNA

VARVARA ALEKSANDROVNA

LEVIN

DR. GRINVALD

OŠEROVIČ

ISAIJEVIČ

DAVID ABRAMOVIČ

PARESIJAN

PRINCE VJAZEMSKI

HANA

MOTHER

FATHER

DR. TAUBE

SNASEREV

KAURIN

THE BANDITS:

KORŠUNIDZE, KRUMINŠ, SEGIDULIN, GADJAŠVILI

GUESTS, CHEKISTS, GUARDS, OFFICERS, SAILORS, SOLDIERS.



THE MECHANICAL LIONS

NOTES

(FOR THE DIRECTOR, THE SCENOGRAPHER, AND THE ACTORS)

I.

1. *The sequence of most of the scenes can be altered, as when you shuffle a deck of cards; the exception is the last scene, which clearly has its place at the conclusion of the play. The scenes may also be repeated, in either unaltered or variant forms.*
2. *Some of the scenes can also be eliminated, insofar as the director deems that necessary.*
3. *In the same way, cues or sets of lines, individual sentences, or words can be discarded or shortened.*
4. *No sets of lines, cues, sentences, or words may be added.*

II.

1. *The GULAG is not a sanatorium.*
2. *The situation in the third scene is not funny: the ladies' curiosity masks a certain dread.*
3. *And the situation in the first scene is even less comical. The point is that this is not an ordinary act of adultery. The ringing of that telephone should make your blood freeze in your veins, and your voice crack with fear.*
4. *The short conversation in the sixth scene could also be carried out in German.*
5. *The quote that Novski and Levin take turns reciting at the end of that same sixth scene is a famous passage from Gogol (from the end of Dead Souls). The quote has been slightly modified.*
6. *In the eighteenth scene the prisoners' slang comes from the Romani culture; these words, in order, are defined as:*

čalavdo = whip

čindano = knife

marav džuwen = (lit.) "I pluck lice" or "I delouse", but it also has a vulgar meaning, more or less the same as the English "Fuck it"

majpalal = in the morning, or tomorrow

barekanéngo = a king (in a deck of cards)

guruvnjori = heifer

barimata = lord or ruler

ma dara = don't be afraid.

7. Fedjukin's favorite expressions ("for example", "so to speak") can, if called for in the judgment of the director or the actor, be used for psychological affect in other places, too. But they shouldn't be abused.

8. Because this is a realistic play, a depiction of bloody, living human destinies, we do not recommend the use of puppets, fake dogs, and artificial horses as props.

SCENE ONE

The apartment of one Nastasja Fedotjevna M., the wife of a local administrator. It is night. Nastasja Fedotjevna and Novski are lying in bed. Nastasja is sleeping blissfully in the wake of their lovemaking (to which the pieces of clothing strewn higgledy-piggledy around the room attest: a sign of passionate urgency), half-naked. Next to her in the large double bed is Novski, who is tossing and turning in the grips of a nightmare. Then the provincial night is torn, abruptly, by the shrill ringing of the telephone.

Novski's hand casts off its spell, and, on the frontier between sleep and wakefulness, he reaches instinctively for the revolver that he always deposited, following a good old habit, under his pillow.

Holding the revolver in his hand, he cuts on the lamp on the nightstand. He accidentally knocks over a glass of vodka. Then he hurriedly pulls on his boots.

The woman stirs in her sleep and ultimately wakes up also, since the phone continues to ring. Dumbfounded, she stares at Novski.

When the telephone abruptly falls silent, they both feel a sense of relief. Then we hear their strained conversation, carried on in half-whisper. Nastasja Fedotjevna is attempting in her confusion to put on the bra that Novski tossed to her from out of the pile of their clothes.

Then the telephone starts to ring again.

NOVSKI (to the woman, sternly): Get up!

He shoves the revolver into his belt. Nastasja, still half asleep, looks at him in shock.

Novski approaches the frightened woman and kisses her between the breasts.

NOVSKI: Pick up the receiver!

Nastasja gets to her feet. Chivalrously Novski places his leather coat over her shoulders.

NASTASJA (*on the telephone*): Who?...Boris Davidovič?...Why might you be...?

Novski puts a finger up to his lips, requesting silence. Nastasja Fedotjevna catches his meaning. After a short pause:

NASTASJA: I have no idea...As I already said, I have no clue...

Apparently the line goes dead before she can finish her sentence. They look at each other for a moment, both of them astonished, frightened.

NASTASJA (*to Novski*): Somebody named Fedjukin...He claims it's urgent.

SCENE TWO

The office of the investigating magistrate, Fedjukin. On the wall, portraits of Stalin and Dzierzinski. Stalin's collected works. A cast-iron stove. In the corner, atop a large stack of books, a big samovar. Behind the desk, off to the side (opposite Fedjukin's leather armchair), is Engineer Butenko. He reaches for the receiver and dials a number. Fedjukin plucks the phone from his hand and hangs it up.

FEDJUKIN (*with a wave of his hand*): Thanks, but that's not necessary. (*Ironic, ambiguously.*) One should not disturb lovers unnecessarily, Citizen Butenko. (*Sinks back in his chair. Musing.*) "Love," says Belinsky, "has its laws of development, including its growth phases, like flowers and like human life...It has its lush spring, its torrid summer, and finally its autumn...And...that autumn is for some warm, bright, and fruitful, and for others...cold, rank, and sterile..." (*Still reflective. Lyrically.*) That's how it is...

Butenko nods in agreement, although he doesn't fully understand what Fedjukin is talking about.

Pause.

Fedjukin tears himself suddenly out of his lyrical reverie, stands up, and walks over to the stove where a tea-kettle stands. He plunges a tea-globe into the boiling water and, having wrapped the metal handle in a grubby handkerchief, carries the kettle over to the table.

FEDJUKIN: Did you know that my samovar is kaputt? (*Pours tea into their cups.*) And as for that lover, he'll turn up here in half an hour at the latest...Boris Davidovič is a genuine revolutionary, if you ask me.

Looks quizzically at Butenko, who is sipping his tea.

BUTENKO: Yes, yes, a real revolutionary.

FEDJUKIN: Don't you find it odd? A healthy young man, yet unmarried, and alone... He's a lover.

BUTENKO: He lives with his sister.

FEDJUKIN (*pensively*): Ah, yes...

BUTENKO: Since the death of Zinaida Mihajlovna...

FEDJUKIN: This is true, this is true...With his sister, you say... (*Pause.*) Zinaida Mihajlovna? Would that be Zinaida Mihajlovna Majnsner?

BUTENKO: Their marriage broke up after less than a year. While she was on a trip to Switzerland (where she had met Novski in her day, back when she was still just a young girl), Zinaida Mihajlovna took up with a diplomat...I believe his name was Karamazov.

Fedjukin jots something down. Pause.

FEDJUKIN (*without raising his head from his notebook*): Please continue.

BUTENKO: As for her brief marriage to Novski, what I heard was that there were agonizing, jealous scenes between them, followed by passionate reconciliations. (*Pause.*) But maybe that story is itself the fruit of jealousy...

FEDJUKIN (*seemingly disinterested*): Whose?

BUTENKO: A certain Mikulin. He had the misfortune of falling in love with her just as her romance with Novski was getting under-

way. After her death, he wrote an obituary in which he said his farewell to her in words that sounded as if they were carved in marble (*thinks back with an air of nostalgia*): "Nature gave her everything: intelligence, talent, beauty." She died as a revolutionary, while on a mission to Persia. She wasn't even thirty.

FEDJUKIN (*absorbed in thought*): A shame, indeed...That tells us that since then Boris Davidovič has been living alone...Too bad, too bad....Such a wonderful human being...

BUTENKO: He seems interested only in science...in experiments.

FEDJUKIN: In experiments, you say...

Butenko attempts to minimize the importance of his statement, as if he had said too much, but he gets himself more and more tangled up.

BUTENKO: I heard that once, I mean, back before the Revolution, he intended to...(with derision in his voice and to the accompaniment of a forced laugh)...to construct a bomb the size of a walnut. (*Another forced laugh.*) Fancy that: the size of a walnut!

Fedjukin picks up the tea globe, which is itself only slightly bigger than a walnut.

FEDJUKIN: Damn it!

He drops the hot tea globe onto the floor next to Butenko. The little pocket bursts open and splatters Butenko's boot. Fedjukin pulls a handkerchief from his pocket and blows on his fingers, as if he had scalded them or wanted to pretend that he had done so; then he gets down on his knees and tries to clean Butenko's boots of the wet sediment from the tea. Butenko pulls away.

BUTENKO: No, please, it doesn't matter...I beg you...

FEDJUKIN: Forgive me, Ivan Nikolajevič...May I call you that?

BUTENKO: Oh, certainly. I'd be delighted.

Fedjukin, holding the reassembled tea globe in his handkerchief, stands up.

FEDJUKIN: So it is...(Looks over at the teapot.) A bomb the size of a nut, with horrifying destructive power...But can you see Boris Davidovič being capable of repairing my samovar, for instance?

Fedjukin returns to his chair.

BUTENKO: To be sure, to be sure...He's a master.

FEDJUKIN: Some more tea?

BUTENKO (*making a gesture of refusal*): No, thank you.

FEDJUKIN (*relaxing in his chair*): Well, well. A great expert, you say...

He begins typing slowly, with two fingers, as if he had completely forgotten Butenko's presence. Now and then he stops and reads over what he's typed.

*Meanwhile two plainclothes agents bring in Novski's personal effects: a trunk full of books, rolls of maps, photographs, photo albums, family portraits, boxes of tools, instruments and machines of various sorts, a tuxedo on a hanger, etc. etc.: Novski's entire past.**

Fedjukin looks philosophically in the agents' direction from time to time and then returns to the text he is penning.

FEDJUKIN: So it is, so it is...

A frock coat on a hanger is brought in. On the lapel there is a faded flower. For a moment Fedjukin sinks back into his chair and stares at the smoke from his cigarette.

He is attempting to reconstruct Novski's biography from memory.

SCENE THREE

It is the spring of 1912, St. Petersburg. The salon of the Gerasimov family. The last chords of a quadrille or a mazurka. The gentlemen bow to the ladies. The guests disperse around the salon, where the older men and women who did not dance are already sitting down. Servants in livery are handing out champagne.

Music in the background, playing softly.

The buzz of the guests' voices.

* A seven-string guitar, a pistol, medals, and decorations—all of it shiny and “modern” in an art nouveau way, in distinct contrast to the objects in the magistrate's office. [Original footnote by D. Kiš]

Marja Gregorovna Popko, wife of a high Tsarist official and the host of this party, rather ostentatiously dressed, unfolds her fan and approaches the somewhat younger Natalija Sergejevna.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: *Ma chère Natalie Sergueïvna, votre histoire m'intrigue à tel point que...* I literally couldn't follow the conversation I was having with my own gallant...Yes (*Inclines her head close to the other women's in intimate confidence.*)... *L'histoire de cette petite servante...*

NATALIJA SERGEJEVNA: I do not know what he could possibly see in her...*Mais c'est une vraie paysanne russe...* Round, rosy-cheeked, and...How shall I put it...Forgive the expression, but she smells of rosewater, sweat, and milk...*Une vraie paysanne... pas très belle...* (*A third lady, Varvara Alexandrovna, joins them.*)

VARVARA ALEXANDROVNA (*who has just heard these last words*): *Mai cela ne'st pas possible, ma chère Natalie Sergueïvna...* Just now I heard that he is married and has fathered a child...*tout cela est un mystère...*

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: What child then?

NATALIJA SERGEJEVNA: *Je ne vous comprends pas.*

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: If you absolutely must know (*leans over even closer towards her*), I learned a few things *directement du général Djounkovski...* *Mais entre nous (conspiratorially)* the affair is already being investigated.

NATALIJA SERGEJEVNA (*stubbornly*): I did hear, nevertheless, that he has a child...

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO (*as if she hadn't heard her*): The Okhrana¹ is carrying out an investigation.

VARVARA ALEXANDROVNA: *Votre général, chère Maria Gregorovna*, has stirred up a hornets' nest.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: So here are a few of the facts: *cette petite serveuse* is ready to testify. She's the only one. Apparently she is but one of the many victims of this *monstre...* *On dit qu'il est capable de décharger vingt fois pour jour.*

VARVARA ALEXANDROVNA: *Décharger?*

¹ The secret or political police in the late Tsarist regime.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: *Ah, chère Varvara Alexandrovna*, don't force me to use another word...

NATALIJA SERGEJEVNA: He does nothing but take advantage of every servant girl he can, like a satyr, and...*(She whispers something into their ears.)*

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: A common drunkard and a satyr... He would seem to be suffering from priapism. *Le général Djounkovski* has proof that this Priapus is abusing the favor of the imperial family...

VARVARA ALEXANDROVNA *(who has still not grasped the quid pro quo)*: I've still never seen him drunk.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: *Ma chère Varvara Alexandrovna*, you have, by your own admission, only seen him one time, and that was, furthermore, from a not inconsiderable distance.

VARVARA ALEXANDROVNA: But who are you talking about exactly?...*C'est un malentendu.*

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: About Rasputin, *mon Dieu*—who else would we be discussing?

A valet approaches Marja Gregorovna Popko. She withdraws for a moment.

VARVARA ALEXANDROVNA: *Oh, excusez-moi. C'est un malentendu.* I thought you were talking about Zemljanikov.

NATALIJA SERGEJEVNA: I understand you completely, *ma chérie*. This Zemljanikov's *un homme très, très charmant*...

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: Do you have any idea who has just been announced? It's Engineer Zemljanikov!

NATALIJA SERGEJEVNA: Speak of the devil!

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: And you, Varvara Alexandrovna, maintain that he is married and has a child? From whom did you hear that, if I may ask?

VARVARA ALEXANDROVNA: There are rumors...Besides, you know yourself that his life is *tout un mystère*...

NATALIJA SERGEJEVNA: I've heard he knows the writer Leonid Andreyev personally.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: I think he simply wants to *briller par son absence*. Even now he's only announcing his arrival at

the last minute...They say he is freshly returned from Berlin. And he will leave, as always, promptly at ten. On the dot.

NATALIJA SERGEJEVNA: Those are all part of his flamboyant ways...Along with the story of his extramarital child and common-law wife. If nowadays a young man desires social success and wants to be a topic of conversation, it's not enough to be a friend of Leonid Andreyev. This young man is going to be a threat to Rasputin's fame.

VARVARA ALEXANDROVNA: You are showing signs of great weakness, Natalija Sergejevna...How your voice trembles, *mon Dieu!*

NATALIJA SERGEJEVNA: *N'exagérons pas.*

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: This story about Berlin, on today of all days, seems very dubious to me. Maybe he intends to mystify, but that changes little. *J'aime les mystères*...Listen to this one: one day I started feeling as though I could not breathe: my house, the city...*la vie, quoi*...I ordered my carriage prepared and took a drive along the edge of the city, almost as far as the Neva...It was insufferably hot...On the roads only two or three carriage drivers were to be seen, and a few hobos. As if life had stopped. Then suddenly I see a *calèche*, painted black, with its horses already unharnessed. (They were hidden in the shade, and the coachman laid down on the ground next to them.) I have a look and inside the *calèche* sits a handsome, elegant young man. Broad shoulders. A little beard and thick dark hair. He had set up a theodolite on the carriage seat and was taking measurements of some kind. "Oh," I say, "this must be Engineer Zemljnikov!" I asked him what he was doing out in that heat. He responded: "St. Petersburg should not underperform compared to Europe...just as you, *chère Madame*, should not fall behind the Europeans in fashion." You know, St. Petersburg will soon be getting electricity...He did the surveying for it...Therefore, there can be no doubt: he is an engineer. But everything else is, I'll grant you, *un mystère*...

The valet approaches. He whispers something in her ear. The three of them all glance curiously at the door.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: This evening we shall clear up some of these mysteries...Engineer Zemljanikov has just arrived!

She goes to the door and disappears amidst the throngs of guests.

SCENE FOUR

The office of the investigating magistrate Fedjukin. The samovar has been repaired. The water in it is boiling. Fedjukin pours himself some tea. Marja Gregorovna Popko is standing in front of him. She is now twenty years older and has gone gray. She is wearing an old black dress and has a frayed shawl over her shoulders.

Fedjukin, leaning back in his armchair, gives off an air of distraction.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO (*in a tired, agonized voice*): On that first night, he left the concert precisely at ten o'clock...That was his habit. Or it was part of his flamboyance...I don't know. I had just sung an aria by Glinka, whom I remember quite well, you know.

FEDJUKIN (*with a vacant look*): You've already said as much...

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: Forgive me.

FEDJUKIN (*after a short pause*): Well? Go on.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: Then for a while no one in our circle of friends saw him....It was said that he traveled often out of the country. Mostly to Berlin. On such occasions he would frequently bring gifts back for his acquaintances, but in those days before the Revolution what interested us most were stories of everyday life there.

FEDJUKIN: What kind of gifts?

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: I can't remember anymore. He once brought my late husband a tiny electric generator that made enough power for one lightbulb. Maybe it was his own handiwork, eh?

FEDJUKIN: Go on.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: Around 1913, after he had begun appearing regularly at the Petersburg *salons*, he sent us a telegram once with the message that he would unfortunately not

be able to attend the reception—a reception in honor of my daughter, who has died since that time. He said he had other commitments. At that point he disappeared without a trace. Our memories of him started to fade, and everything seemed to indicate that his visits to the *salons* were just a passing fad. One of those fads that meet the cheerless fate of quick oblivion. In his place appeared a handsome young cadet, a certain Vasilij Ivanovič...Vasilij Ivanovič...*(She is unable to recall his last name.)*

FEDJUKIN: Unimportant. But continue.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: One evening in the autumn of 1913, that same year, I mean, I caught sight of him while I was out in my carriage. It was in Stolypinskaya street, and he was among the half-frozen, starving prisoners there. He was wearing shackles. I went up to him and dropped a coin in his hands. He said thank you, but pretended not to recognize me. There's no doubt about it, though: it was him. His eyes and the hair, as well as a vestige of that unmistakable charm...

FEDJUKIN: You can skip that kind of stuff, for instance.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: Thus Zemljanikov's spirit again made itself felt in our *salons*, endangering for a brief while the fame of Rasputin. But Rasputin was at that time—

FEDJUKIN: You can, so to speak, skip the part about Rasputin... *(That chapter had a happy ending.)* What do you know about his activities at the time?

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: As far as I know, this so-called Mihail Vasilievič Zemljanikov was none other than Boris Davidovič...I learned that during the Revolution, when we fled to Odessa...That's when my late husband, may God rest his soul—

FEDJUKIN: Skip that part...What was Novski doing in those days? Do you know anything specific about that?

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: This so-called Zemljanikov used, as far as I know, his frequent trips abroad for things that were altogether treasonous...Upon his final return from Berlin, at the beginning of 1914 or the end of 1913, the police at the frontier supposedly found, in those black leather suitcases of

his that were otherwise stuffed with gifts, silken shirts, and expensive suits, fifty Brownings of German manufacture. I heard that from my late husband who, as you know, was close to General Djunkovsky in those days, who in turn still had connections to the secret police, though his relationship with the Okhrana had become a bit shakier as a result of his investigation of Rasputin.

FEDJUKIN (*waving his hand*): You can skip that part.

MARJA GREGOROVNA POPKO: After the assassination of Governor von Launitz, people thought he was dead: three witnesses confirmed that the head on display in a jar of alcohol they were shown was Zemljanikov's. That is to say, it was Novski's...It took the arrival on the scene of that demon, Azef,² for people to decide that the head in the ethyl alcohol, already slightly wrinkled, had nothing in common with the "Assyrian" skull of the so-called Zemljanikov...You can see how readily he changed his identity and how he simply could not be caught... I don't know where he could be.

FEDJUKIN: He's been arrested.

Gives a sign to the guards to take her away.

The guards draw close and lead her, not to the exit, but to the row of cells. Horror-stricken, she looks over at Fedjukin, who keeps hammering at the keys of his typewriter.

SCENE FIVE

A cattle car on a side track. The crack of dawn. Fog. Fedjukin, wearing boots and a budyonovka, approaches the car. He is accompanied by two Chekists. At his sign they stop.

One of the Chekists unlatches the door to the train car and opens it just enough for Fedjukin to climb in.

² Yevno Azef (1869–1918) was a one-time revolutionary who was recruited by the Tsarist secret police as an *agent provocateur*. His violent acts, extremely successful, long-term deceptions, and unscrupulousness earned him great notoriety among the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks.

In one corner of the car sits Novski. He's been broken by two weeks of investigative detention. He is still wearing a summer suit.

Novski attempts to stand up. Fedjukin signals for him to stay seated.

FEDJUKIN: Just stay there...(Sits down facing him, on the floor.—
Takes off his gloves and rubs his hands.) Wicked cold...And you are freezing, for instance. I'll order them to find some warmer clothing for you...All right then, Boris Davidovič, all right. So you don't want to talk to me...Well, fine...But see here: I stopped this whole convoy so that we could have a real talk, man-to-man. There are now so to speak hundreds of prisoners in these cars who are freezing because of you, so you alone are responsible for their misery, Boris Davidovič. In other words, you are increasing the length of their journey by several hours. Well fine. That's your right. Rabinovič is also among those wretches. Does that name mean anything to you? Isak Rabinovič.

NOVSKI: No.

FEDJUKIN: Always no. (Gets to his feet and paces back and forth.) No, no, no....In the whole two weeks that I've had so to speak the pleasure of conversing with you, all you've had to say is no, like that, esteemed Boris Davidovič. What am I saying, conversing? It's a monologue, punctuated by your: No, no, no! (Continues walking around the interior of the rail car.) I didn't expect that for instance from, you, being an old revolutionary. Word of honor. This eternal "No" from the days of Tsarist prisons and procurators. But we're no longer living in an era of Tsarist casemates, Boris Davidovič. This is a revolutionary tribunal, a revolutionary investigation...That's what you are too stubborn to recognize.

Sits down near Boris Davidovič. Pause.

FEDJUKIN: All right, all right. The convoy will just have to wait. Do you know what the temperature is outside?...No, no, your situation cannot be compared to that; you are for example on the leeward side...No matter. But I'm going to tell you something, even though in doing so I am breaking certain behavioral norms and exposing myself to danger, so to speak.

Novski draws back a little.

FEDJUKIN: Yes, yes, I'm breaking certain regulations, because, Boris Davidovič, I am now for example, speaking unofficially and confidentially with an enemy of the state...And that's not, for instance, all that advisable. Every Chekist learns that in boot camp. But never mind. I have to tell you, Boris Davidovič, that you have disappointed me. You, a man of education, who can speak so many languages, for instance, and who once served the Revolution so faithfully...Yes, I say "the Revolution", although I know you were close to the Socialist Revolutionaries, and those SR's betrayed the revolution.

Stands up, paces nervously back and forth.

FEDJUKIN: Let's just assume, then, with a nod to your conversion of 1914, that you are a revolutionary of the old school... And you, Boris Davidovič, do you doubt me or my devotion to the Revolution?...Say what now? I don't hear an answer... Then I might just be right, because I don't believe you doubt me or my revolutionary background—if for no other reason than that I am still defending the interests of the Revolution and am protecting it from its enemies—I take it at face value, because it's unthinkable otherwise; I posit, therefore, that you are convinced of my dedication to the Revolution. So, what happens now? Two men committed to the Revolution, two people who lived for the Revolution and do so still, even if their paths have been at variance, two so-called pillars of the new society, now stand facing each other like enemies... And why? Simply because one of them, beholden to a long outdated code of honor and morality and by habit, is not willing to sacrifice himself for a cause that is far superior to all petty bourgeois moral categories. And who suffers on account of this, so to speak? Everyone, Boris Davidovič, everyone. Society, and the Revolution, first and foremost. By dint of seniority. And then, so to speak, the people who are currently freezing in the Stolypin cars, waiting to continue their long journey. And then there's me, too, Boris Davidovič, me...You certainly

aren't thinking of that. But you see that I am not drawing too much attention to it...I, Boris Davidovič, have abandoned my family, for instance. I go for weeks without seeing my wife; I sleep in the office, either in the armchair or on the table, like in the most trying days of the war; and I subsist on salted herring and dry bread...But, as I said, the part about me isn't important now...I, Boris Davidovič, I have erased my personal destiny. It just out and out doesn't exist...

Stops, pondering.

FEDJUKIN: And of course you are also suffering, Boris Davidovič. For, you see, I'm no great loss...One Fedjukin can be replaced by ten others...who are neither better nor worse. Or by ten better ones, to be honest. Therefore, the Revolution, for instance, misses out on nothing by that. But you, Boris Davidovič, you are, if I may put it this way, irreplaceable...If you no longer existed (let's assume you took ill with consumption or something of that sort), well, with your disappearance, then it's not just one man who disappears, one man still useful to the Revolution, but also a myth, a revolutionary myth, from which generations of young revolutionaries will live...Therein lies the difference, Boris Davidovič...You speak ten European languages, you play the guitar, you are well versed for example in political economy, the history of Marxism, the Talmud, and the Bible. You are personally acquainted with many leaders of our Revolution and you can without a doubt recall their words, for instance...And lest I forget: you are a technical genius, Boris Davidovič. Your brain is home to one-of-a-kind formulae for explosives. You are not merely in a position to repair in the blink of an eye a tea kettle as you did, so to speak, in my office, without any tools for example. You are also capable of constructing a bomb the size of a walnut...

Novski flinches.

FEDJUKIN: Did you say something?

Novski bows his head again.

FEDJUKIN: All right, then...So, a bomb the size of a walnut. That's how it's recorded not only in Butenko's reports, but in those of several other people, about which I of course can disclose nothing to you...Not because I don't trust you, for example—no, far from it. It's on account of the law, and for the maintenance of secrecy...(Pause.) And you are capable of constructing bridges, buildings, automobiles, and gliders, along with airplanes, factories and gadgets and tools of all types...And in the same way you could destroy them all...Poof! Kaputt! Blown sky-high...And all of that, Boris Davidovič, is hiding away within your cerebral cortex, which is unique and cannot be duplicated...And, well, look here, that's why I don't understand...How could you comport yourself this way, treating your talent and your one-of-a-kind personality like this? Why not place yourself in the service of higher goals? Put yourself at the disposal of the cause of the revolution and progress?...What would be the point in all of this just disappearing, Boris Davidovič, this intelligence, all of the experience, even this whole man. I ask you, therefore, what sense would it make, for instance, if all of that went away as if it had never existed...A man such as this, and all because of this outdated middle-class obstinacy, and a petty bourgeois world view.

Pause.

FEDJUKIN: Well, all right, all right...I have to admit, Boris Davidovič, you disappoint me very very much. Do you even know (this is now a very personal confession from me to you) that you were my role model for years?...Novski, Novski...It meant something to me, and in some ways it still does today...Do you even know, Boris Davidovič, that I for example devoured every word that you wrote under your pseudonyms?...Jakov Mauser, for example...Just as I listened with wonderment to the tales of your deeds from the mouths of those who had the honor of knowing you. Yes, yes. No need to protest...I still hold you in great esteem today, Boris Davidovič, but I no longer understand you. Most certainly I do not wish to compare myself to you, so to speak; aside from Russian, I can only speak a little Ukrainian

and a few words of German, from my time at the front...But did you know that it's because of you that I've begun learning Yiddish? Yes, yes. Yiddish...But that's beside the point. In no way do I hold a candle to you; compared to you, I know, as I stated, nothing, but I did remain faithful to revolutionary morality, Boris Davidovič, and that's where we parted ways...I have, so to speak, expunged all petty bourgeois moral norms from myself, all of that flotsam and jetsam, because for me devotion to the Revolution is the only moral standard...And you, Boris Davidovič? You are for instance, despite your knowledge and experience, despite your reading, your work, and your language abilities, or perhaps precisely because of all of them, you have remained at your core a man of the old stamp...See how that pains me?...Right before my eyes, an idol of my youth is collapsing, like a pillar of sand getting carried off by the wind...For, what I actually want from you, Boris Davidovič, what I—

He hears a knock on the outside of the door of the carriage. A pounding, actually, as with the stock of a gun. Fedjukin looks down at his wristwatch.

FEDJUKIN: There it is. I'm sorry...Just flat out sorry about this. All you have to do is sign here. Boris Davidovič, and then everything will be in order. You are, in other words, supposed to place your confessions in the service of a cause that far transcends our individual lives...You say you don't know this Rabinovič....All right, all right. And you call yourself a revolutionary...You demand that I make it possible for you to contact people in high places, but you can't see yourself clear to do something for me, yes, *for me*, by placing your signature underneath this confession. It is what it is...

He pulls off his gloves and roots around in the inner pocket of his coat. He pulls out a file folder and looks through it carefully.

FEDJUKIN (*muttering*): Good, good. All right, then...Novski the revolutionary is, therefore, deceased...So it is. (*After a brief pause.*) You know (this reminds me of it), I always admired your courage, Boris Davidovič...You were the organizer of, and one of the participants in, that famous "expropriation" of a

mail car that allowed the revolutionaries to get their hands on several million rubles. I used to read, for example, the underground newspaper *Eastern Dawn*, mostly for your articles, Boris Davidovič...Word of honor.

He makes a dismissive gesture, goes to the door, and pounds his fist against it. One can hear someone outside rattling the lock.

FEDJUKIN (*tugging his gloves on*): You see, I did not expect this from you, Boris Davidovič. I most certainly did not expect it.

The door opens, sliding slowly to the side. Fog pours into the train car and shapes lose their definition.

SCENE SIX

The salon of an elegant Swiss sanatorium. Time for the mid-day meal. At one of the tables sit Novski and his friend of about the same age, Levin.

NOVSKI: ...an extraordinary man. He grasped that there is a certain relationship between physical and mental health, which in and of itself is completely plausible, though too little credence been made given to it....Although, as far back as the works of Galen and Paracelsus, elements of this teaching can be found...When my friend Grinvald made this discovery, he began to study psychiatry with Jung but continued, on the side, working in his specialty: lung disease. In this complicated dynamic, he discovered, to wit...

Dr. Grinvald shows up and joins them; he is quiet and polite, with a slightly nasal manner of speaking.

NOVSKI: *Permettez-moi de vous présenter monsieur Levine.*

Grinvald and Levin exchange bows.

NOVSKI: Mr. Levin is an old friend of mine. He's just passing through town.

A servant in livery brings a chair for Dr. Grinvald.

DR. GRINVALD (*taking his seat*): We, gentlemen, we are in the midst of a beautiful October. My patients are, however, rather irritable. The sun is having a magnetic effect, a dangerous one, that is, on them. Don't you find it so, Mr. Tverdohljebov?

NOVSKI: I'll admit I've not been sleeping well of late.

LEVIN: *Docteur, il est très sensible. (Pats Novski on the shoulder.)* Another month and Tverdohljebov here will be back to his old self...Isn't that so, Doctor?

DOCTOR GRINVALD: Personally, Mr. Tverdohljebov, I represent the opinion that your insomnia is the consequence of purely esthetic excitement. Considering your temperature chart, I come to the conclusion that your temperature goes up in the days right after a concert...(To Levin.) We are in the habit of organizing concerts here, put on by the patients themselves...Mr. Tverdohljebov is hypersensitive to music...I would go so far as to say that his organism has more difficulty handling sophisticated blows than crude ones...Do you know what I mean? His *sensibilité*...

LEVIN: He was just telling me that a few days ago you had a concert by one of our countrywomen. The young countess Šahovskaja...

NOVSKI: A true talent...In so far as...

DR. GRINVALD: What are you trying to say?

NOVSKI: In so far as this talent of hers is not also part of her illness...I am speaking, therefore, as your pupil...

DR. GRINVALD: Indeed it is possible....for illness, you know, to sharpen the hearing and drive one's talent to perfection, because often it is precisely a disturbance of one's sensibilities that leads to the most astonishing results. I am thinking back to the arrival of the Comtesse Šahovskaja...At first she played Chopin and Brahms, ably, with remarkable skill, but that was practice and experience...The most recent concerts...

NOVSKI (*to Levin*): The day after her concert—she died. She expired gently, fading away like a sonata by Chopin.

Pause.

Dr. Grinvald stand up and bows.

DR. GRINVALD: If you will excuse me, duty calls...It was a pleasure.

LEVIN: *Enchanté.*

NOVSKI: *Merci, docteur.*

DR. GRINVALD (to Levin): So you are also a Russian...By the way, since we are already on the topic, I've heard that a revolution has broken out in St. Petersburg.

Novski starts. The spoon in Levin's hand freezes in mid-air. While giving his face the expression of the greatest indifference possible, he also tries to mask the trembling of his hands and voice.

NOVSKI: What? Where did you hear that?

DR. GRINVALD: This morning in town. I read about it in the displays at the telegraph office...But why do you ask, if I may know?

NOVSKI: Oh, it's nothing. Forgive me.

Dr. Grinvald moves away, somewhat astonished by his patient's exaggerated reaction.

NOVSKI (*whispering, in a state of excitement bordering on delirium*): Listen up, Levin. Listen! Do you hear anything?

LEVIN: For God's sake, calm down. Wait till he is gone.

NOVSKI: I was asking if you heard anything.

LEVIN: I hear my heart racing.

NOVSKI: And what else, Levin?

LEVIN: I don't hear anything else. I'm suffocating here.

NOVSKI: Listen more closely.

LEVIN: I hear the murmur of voices in the *salon* and the clinking of silverware.

NOVSKI: It sounds like chimes.... "Where are you flying? Give me an answer...The bells set up a wondrous ringing..."

LEVIN (*continuing*): "It hums past, and thrashes the air like the whipping wind..."

NOVSKI: "Everything on earth flies past, and other peoples and countries, wrinkling their brow in concern, stand aside and make room for it to pass..."³ And I can see—as through fog

³ These three quotes are from the end of Part One of Nikolai Gogol's 1842 novel *Dead Souls*. The English translation here is a modified version of that found in Dmitry Merezhkovsky, "Gogol and the Devil," in *Gogol from the Twentieth Century: Eleven Essays*, edited and translated by Robert A. Maguire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 75–76. Kiš's citation of this passage is not continuous or complete.

(Both stand up now.)—a world that is stuck behind us (They walk towards the doors and then turn around.) and now sinks irretrievably into the past like into turbid waters...

SCENE SEVEN

Two guards lead Novski down a shadowy stairwell that descends into the dizzying depths of the three underground levels of the prison. He is just a shadow of his former self. He's battered and enervated by the lack of sleep, and he can barely walk.

The room into which he is taken is lit only by one naked bulb, hanging from the ceiling.

The guards unhand him, and he sways. They leave the room and bolt the steel door from outside. For a moment Novski stands alone, breathless, as if he's just been through a tremendous exertion. Then the door opens abruptly. A young man of about twenty is shoved across the threshold. He flies across the room and collapses near Novski. Then Fedjukin enters the room, freshly shaven and girded with a prominent belt. He is followed by a pair of guards.

With great effort Novski opens his swollen eyelids and studies the young man, who is naked to the waist. Fedjukin stands silently behind Novski, as if he had crept secretly into the room.

FEDJUKIN: Novski, do you recognize this young man?...Ošerovič.
Ilja Ošerovič-Plavnik.

Novski raises his head, and opens his eyelids again. He studies the young man once more and then shakes his head.

FEDJUKIN (*grabs the young man by the hair and jerks his face around to Novski*): Do you know this man?

OŠEROVIČ (*fearful*): No. No. I swear I do not know him...

FEDJUKIN (*releases the young man*): So. That means you don't know him?

OŠEROVIČ: I've never seen him before...I swear it!

FEDJUKIN: Look here, Ošerovič. We're going to kill you anyway, even if Novski doesn't confess.

THE MECHANICAL LIONS

The young man shoots Novski a look of alarm, and then drops on the floor at Novski's feet.

OŠEROVIČ: Confess, citizen, I beseech you. Confess...What have I ever done to you? I have a mother...You, you've already lived your life, citizen...You could be my father...Except that my father perished at the front...And both of my brothers...

Novski's muteness leaves him in total despair.

The guards load their revolvers. In this subterranean space, the noise echoes three times.

OŠEROVIČ (*screaming*): Confess, confess! They're going to kill me. Don't you see that they're going to kill me!...Admit it!

The guards draw near to the young man. They place the barrels of their revolvers against his neck. He is still kneeling on the floor.

OŠEROVIČ: Save me, I beg of you. Or you'll be damned, in this world and the next. Confess! Confess—for the sake of my life! How have I ever hurt you?...(*Screaming.*) Confess!

Novski presses his lips together and squeezes his eyes shut.

The guards fire into the nape of the young man's neck.

The young man tumbles to the floor.

Fedjukin gives the guards the signal to take Novski away. They take him by the arm.

They walk him over to the steps and then upstairs.

SCENE EIGHT

A wedding celebration on the naval vessel "Spartacus," which is at anchor in a harbor. The date is December 1919. The ship is decorated with beacons and lit by red, green, blue, and even more red lanterns. The crew (seven or eight sailors) stand stiffly at attention on the deck, as if they were at an inspection. The bridal couple walks past them. Boris Davidovič Novski and Zinaida Mihajlovna Majnsner. They are greeted by shouts of acclaim. The ship's siren goes off.

OFFICER: Salute!

The sailors stiffen and follow them with their eyes.

OFFICER: Three cheers!

SAILORS: Hip, hip, hooray!

The couple exchanges kisses before the eyes of the crew. Then they start to move along, but at that moment a radio operator comes down the steps. He blows a whistle. Half-way down the stairs from the command bridge, he stops; the beam of a floodlight catches him. He starts reading, shouting so that everyone can hear:

RADIO OPERATOR: An uncoded telegram from Astrakhan: "Long live the newlyweds! Long live the Red Fleet! Three cheers for the brave crew of the Spartacus! Signed, the officers and men of the ship—"

His voice is drowned out by the sailors' cries: "Hurrah! Hurrah! Long live the newlyweds!"

Now the floodlight of another torpedo boat lands on two sailors who, accompanied by an officer, are bringing crates of champagne.

Saluting, the officer says to Novski:

OFFICER: Nine cases of champagne, confiscated from anarchists.
Forwarded from the Revolutionary Council of Kronstadt.

Novski removes a bottle from one of the crates, peers at the label, and then, like a connoisseur, pops it open. The champagne bubbles over. Novski fills the glasses on the table. The newlyweds toast each other, and the sailors shout "Bravo!" The newlyweds kiss.

Novski fills the other glasses. The officers and sailors drink.

Suddenly a brass band is heard. As the floodlight plays on the fog, we see the sailors' "oompah band" climb on board the Spartacus while they manage to keep playing without interruption.

Novski, carried away, hurls an empty bottle into the sea.

The newlyweds begin to dance. Soon two or three sailors also start to dance. Then unexpectedly the musical instruments begin to clang and squeak, and then they break off. Someone has noticed the Chekists climbing aboard. By the time the Cheka officers reach the deck, the newlyweds

have already vanished. The Chekists have pulled their revolvers. There are three of them.

FIRST CHEKIST: Break it up!

SECOND CHEKIST: Get those lights out of here immediately! Who here is responsible for security?

OFFICER: I am.

FIRST CHEKIST: Where is the commander?

OFFICER: On the bridge.

FIRST CHEKIST (*to the other two*): Let's go. (*To the officer.*) Make sure those bulbs are out before we get back. Understood?

OFFICER: Understood.

The Chekists dash away. A few seconds later the lights start going out. Shortly thereafter the Chekists appear at the railing of the bridge. They fire their guns into the air: Hurrah! Hurrah!

The lights come back on.

SECOND CHEKIST: Hooray for the married couple!

OFFICERS AND SAILORS: Hooray!

A Chekist goes over to the anti-aircraft cannon and lets off a salvo into the air. Merriment, shouting, glasses being swiftly drained, smashing champagne bottles. Dancing, whooping, the rolling about of empty bottles. The brass band plays like mad.

Pause.

The day breaks. A grim winter dawn. The officers and sailors are lying on the deck among shards of glass. One Chekist is hanging over the rail, and another sleeps in the gunner's seat of an anti-aircraft cannon.

The lights go out one by one.

The last light burning is the one in the window of the command bridge. Here we catch sight of Zinaida Mihajlovna, stretching luxuriously, wantonly, for a moment.

Then all at once she disappears.

SCENE NINE

Novski, beaten to a pulp, lies in the corner of his cell.

The door is flung open and in walks Fedjugin with a pair of guards.

One of the guards pours a pail of water over Novski's head.

Novski props himself up on his elbows.

The guards grab him by the arms and lead him down another winding staircase, lower and lower, as if they were going to hell.

Everything proceeds precisely as in Scene Seven.

Now there is, however, a different young man. Novski looks him up and down from under his swollen eyelids: the young man looks like him, Novski, twenty years earlier.

The scene is endless, as if frozen. Fedjugin is standing behind Novski.

FEDJUKIN (to Novski): Boris Davidovič, do you know this young man? Naum Isaijević Mendel...Does the name mean anything to you? Nothing? What's that.....Nothing?

Fedjugin gives Novski time to notice the similarity and to comprehend that it is intentional, the result of a careful process of selection. The similarity was intended to make it clear to Novski that his silence was consigning to death people similar to himself.

Novski shakes his head.

FEDJUKIN (to the young man): Do you know this man?

The young man regards Novski spitefully but holds his tongue.

Provoked, Fedjugin grabs him by the hair and twists his head toward Novski.

The young man still refuses to speak. His teeth are clenched.

FEDJUKIN (to the young man): So that means you don't recognize him?

Pause.

FEDJUKIN (to the young man): You will die, Isaijević, in the event that Novski does not confess. Isaijević flashes a quick glance at Novski, as if the name did in fact mean something to him.

Novski makes a small gesture, barely visible, like someone who is unsure. Squinting with his short-sighted eyes, he studies the young man.

THE MECHANICAL LIONS

The young man eyes Novski, too, from right up close, like someone whose eyeglasses have been taken away.

At last the young man leans over to Novski and hisses, in a voice that makes the other man's skin crawl:

ISAJEVIĆ (*hissing like a snake, but in a whisper; angry, resolute, and implacable*): Boris Davidovič, don't play into the hands of these sons of bitches!

In the same instant, at a signal from Fedjukin, the guards place their barrels on the back of the young man's neck and squeeze the triggers.

Isaijević crumples and topples over, and Novski cringes, as if hit by an electric shock.

Fedjukin exits the dungeon without a word but with both of the guards in tow.

Novski collapses onto the floor of his cell.

SCENE TEN

The salon of an elegant Swiss sanatorium (like the one in Scene Six). Breakfast has just concluded.

Novski and Zinaida Mihajlovna Majsner are seated at a table. A silver teapot and porcelain cups are arrayed in front of them.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: Boris Davidovič! (*She glances abruptly at an older couple sipping coffee at the next table. Zinaida knows she has acted imprudently by addressing Novski by his real name. As if she wants to correct this, she lowers her voice, and when she uses his name again, this time it's in a whisper.*) Boris Davidovič, in our country your articles are read with the greatest interest. I mean, in our home and in the broad circle of those people who are connected with our household and whom I would call progressive spirits. You see, if someone had told me that I'd become acquainted with the author of those articles from the *Neue Zeitung* and the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, I would've told them that was impossible. And do you know why? Because amongst us, people were of the view that behind all these pseudonyms—Parabellum, Viktor Tverdohljebov—

NOVSKI: —B.N. Dolski, Proletarski, N.L Davidovič—

He gives an impatient wave of his hand.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: That behind all these names was concealed an entire circle of freethinkers...With your review of Max Schippel's *History of the Production of Sugar* you caused quite a rift in Russia. At least in the circle of people close to our family, dear Mr. Tverdohljebov...My father—

NOVSKI: In those days, the social democratic newspapers were still fit for texts of that type.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: My father, in a conversation with a certain Oskar Blum, once—

NOVSKI: Blum and I were linked by a number of shared ideas, and we had the same views on matters of war and peace. If I'm not mistaken, he—

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: Well, yes, this same Blum was the first to try to convince my father that all the mysterious persons writing these incendiary texts (*She casts a side-long look at him.*)—that all these texts came from the same hand, namely yours.

She picks up his hand and looks at it briefly. Novski in turn gives her hand a squeeze, but she pulls it away.

NOVSKI: I heard that Blum has turned defeatist.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: He described you to my father as an odd mixture of amorality, cynicism, and spontaneous enthusiasm for ideas, books, music, and human beings. He said: "Tverdohljebov, gentlemen, is something between a professor and a bandit...but his intellectual *brío* is beyond question."

NOVSKI: Should I take that as a compliment?

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER (*pauses briefly and gives him a curious look*): Boris Da—Mr. Tverdohljebov, who are you, actually? I am asking not only—

NOVSKI: Our biography, dear Zinaida Mihajlovna, our lives—they have no meaning of any sort, aside from in the case of this kind of personal intimacy. (*He leans over towards her.*) The

biography of a revolutionary blends into history...and disappears into it, the way a stream vanishes into a river, a river into the sea, into an ocean...

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: Meaning that identity is lost...

They continue sitting, silently, lost in thoughts about their lives.

NOVSKI: Then consider what I am about to tell you, Zinaida Mihajlovna, as a story, because as a story, perhaps, it is not uninteresting. As a story, therefore, about some random man. And, as in every story, it all starts with birth. The positivist formula involving environment and breeding is at least as true for human beings as it is for Flemish painting. (*Pours himself some tea.*) In 1885, after Christmas, the Second Tsarist Cavalry Regiment made a stop on the western bank of the Dniepr, in order to observe the festival of the Epiphany. A certain Prince Vjazemski, who held the rank of colonel of the cavalry, raised the symbol of Christ, a silver cross, from out of the ice-cold water. Beforehand the soldiers had blasted open the thick sheet of ice with dynamite, making an open space about two hundred meters long...The water was the color of steel. The young Prince Vjazemski—

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: I had the opportunity to get to know him...At that time, he was already—Oh, excuse me. I interrupted you.

NOVSKI: So the young prince refused to let them tie a rope around his waist.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: Aristocratic pride...

NOVSKI: He crossed himself and lifted his blue eyes up to the crystal sky of winter...(At any rate, that's the way I imagine it, from my father's telling of it.) His return from the icy torrents was greeted with rifle salutes and, later, in the improvised officer's mess in the local school building, with the popping of corks from champagne bottles. Even the soldiers received holiday rations: 700 grams of Russian cognac each. A personal gift to the Second Cavalry from Prince Vjazemski.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: The Russian people live between the lash and alcohol. Their celebrations are suicidal...

NOVSKI: They drank till late in the afternoon. The celebrations had started right after the conclusion of divine liturgy in the village church.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: Because for Russians drunkenness is necessary in order to receive the blessing of both God and the tsar. That way, they can drink themselves to death but still have a clear conscience. Until—

She breaks off precipitously, and then touches Novski's hand to indicate that he should continue.

NOVSKI: Only one of them steered clear of the church service: a certain soldier by the name of David Abramovič.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: Your father.

NOVSKI (*goes on speaking, but with visibly less gusto after her comment*): He was reading the Talmud...lying in a warm manger in a horse stable...He claimed as much, anyway. But of course these manifold literary and religious associations make this dubious to me. Above all the part about the Talmud...But no matter...Perhaps I am boring you with my story, Zinaida Mihajlovna. We'd be better off taking a walk in the park and chatting about something sensible.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: You know, Boris Davidovič (*at this she turns around, but the last guests have already left the salon*), I am interested in everything about you. I urge you to keep talking. I want to hear about everything connected with your life, everything...

NOVSKI: One of the soldiers noticed his absence and set out to find him...They located him in the horse stall (my father asserted it was a manger), with the untouched bottle of cognac beside him. So they forced him to drink what His Grace, the Tsar, had given as a gift...

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: And this with God's blessing!

NOVSKI: As punishment, they stripped him to the waist, so as not to stain the Tsar's uniform, and proceeded to give him a lashing with the knout.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: Someone should write a history of the Russian people as a history of the knout. You could

do that better than anyone, Boris Davidovič. You are such a magnificent storyteller.

NOVSKI: Eventually they tied the unconscious man behind a horse and dragged him down to the Dniepr. There, where the ice had been blown away, a thin new layer had formed. They shoved him into gelid water, holding him by the reins they had bound around his waist so that he wouldn't drown...After he was half-dead and blue with cold, and they had pulled him from the water, they poured the rest of the cognac down his throat, held the silver cross over his forehead and sang like a choir: "The Fruit of Your Womb"...*(Pause.)* Towards evening he had a high fever and they carried him from the stable to the house of a village teacher named Solomon Melamud. Melamud's sixteen-year old daughter rubbed the unfortunate soldier's wounds with cod-liver oil. Before he departed with his regiment, which had been hastily called into action to put down an uprising, David Abramovič, still feverish but perhaps this time with love, swore to the girl he would return...And he kept that promise...And from that romantic encounter, the credibility of which, my dear Zinaida Mihajlovna, is not in any way in doubt, will be born Boris Davidovič, better known by the names Tverdohljebov, Bezrabotni, Novski, etc., etc.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: Boris Davidovič, you are an extraordinary storyteller. You simply must turn that into a novel...

They stand up. Zinaida Mihajlovna puts her arm in his.

NOVSKI: In the archives of the Okhrana, there are three birthdates given: 1891...*(The rest of his words are inaudible. The doorway has swallowed our two walkers.)*

SCENE ELEVEN

The office of the investigating magistrate. Novski is sitting across from Fedjukin. His wrists are wrapped in bandages.

FEDJUKIN: 1893 and 1896. How do you explain that?

NOVSKI (*indifferent*): That's the result of the fake documents that revolutionaries used to use. You gave the clerk or the priest a bit of change, and basta! It was done. Further evidence of official corruption.

Fedjukin thumbs through the file.

FEDJUKIN: Well, now...Seems we cleared that up...And why don't you drop this nonsense (*points to the other man's wrists*). Boris Davidovič: permit me to call you by this name, since you have just been born again. It's harder, for example, for a man to pick his death than it is his life...

NOVSKI: I am all grown up. Why should I change my biography? Whenever I look back—

FEDJUKIN: We're no longer talking about the past, about some far-off time, but about the present. And, for instance, Boris Davidovič, the future. Yes, it's about the future...The future of the revolution.

NOVSKI: As the case may be. But I am not prepared to sign this document. Even if it costs me my life.

FEDJUKIN: What document?

NOVSKI: To the effect that I, along with your man Rajnhold, or whatever his name is, belonged to a spy network in the pay of the English...Such a confession would cancel out my entire life up to this point.

FEDJUKIN: I don't understand. What are you talking about?

NOVSKI: I have never met any man named Richards from the English trade unions movement. I have never taken a single penny from anyone, and I have never worked for any spy outfit. And at the time in question I was in Paris, not Berlin. These are the facts...

FEDJUKIN: Aha. So you're still stuck on that story, Boris Davidovič. I had completely lost track of that, for example...A misunderstanding pure and simple. And please, do not interrupt me... You are claiming, therefore, never to have met anyone named Richards...All right. I accept that. We now have incontrovertible proof, Boris Davidovič, that you never met anyone named Richards...(*Leans across the table towards him, handing him a newspaper.*) I too was convinced of that earlier...without fur-

ther evidence. Merely on the strength of your sincere revolutionary's confession.

NOVSKI (*takes the paper*): What is this?

FEDJUKIN (*pulls the paper from the dossier*): You read English...Go ahead. I have a translation here. This Richards of yours—of ours, actually—said under oath, and some authoritative eye-witnesses have confirmed it, that on the day in question he was not actually in Berlin...

Novski reads, short-sightedly, holding the paper very close to his face.

FEDJUKIN: Between us—these English labor unions are making too much of a racket about your disappearance (they're calling it your arrest)...I'm just mentioning this parenthetically to you....With a different investigating magistrate, one who knows you less well and holds you in less esteem, for instance, this would only have increased doubts, and that would have been detrimental to your cause...(Pulls the newspaper from Novski's hands.)...And?

NOVSKI: That's irrefutable proof...No one can be in two places at once...

FEDJUKIN: You see? And why this tempest in a teacup, then, to so speak, —and beyond that, what's up with—(*pointing to his wrists*) with this petty bourgeois loss of nerve...That is only a sign, Boris Davidovič, of your lack of faith in revolutionary justice...This miserable attempt...If you had, so to speak, been successful two or three days ago at carrying out your cowardly—you know exactly what I mean—then you wouldn't be able to stand here today as a man with a spotless past. To put it simply, you would have died as a spy. And that, Boris Davidovič, would have been a waste and an injustice.

NOVSKI: I repeat: I have reached a ripe old age, so why should I alter my biography?

FEDJUKIN: It's always about you and your biography, isn't it, Boris Davidovič...Has anyone, for example, cast doubt upon it? Who? Where? And when? (*Paging through the files.*) What's more, your biography, for instance, is immaculate...If you are, so to speak, of the opinion that something has been left out,

then let's correct that, Boris Davidovič, forthwith...Don't be embarrassed to speak up, if you think something is wrong, or has been characterized inaccurately in your dossier...

Pours tea and hands a cup to Novski, who declines it with a motion of his hand.

FEDJUKIN: Well, fine...But let's leave any personal bad blood out of this...So that brings us to this: in February of 1913, you were in Baku, where you worked as a locomotive engineer...

NOVSKI: As assistant to the fireman on a train.

FEDJUKIN (*enters this point into the file*): Very well. As-sis-tant-fire-man...In September of that same year a certain Tverdohljebov was operating as a strike organizer in a wallpaper manufactory in Tsaritsyn...

NOVSKI: In Ivano-Voznesensk...this strike was organized by...

FEDJUKIN (*correcting his files*): In Iv-an-o-voz-ne-sensk. Good. One of the leaders of the strike in Ivano-Voznesensk...In November you were among the organizers of street protests in St. Petersburg...

NOVSKI: In October...(Thinking back.) the police broke up that demonstration with sabers and the black leather whips. The Junker variant of the knout.

FEDJUKIN (*correcting his file*): In-Oct-ob-er...

NOVSKI: That time I got away by fleeing through the back door of a public house in Dolgorukovskaja Street...I don't remember what the place is called nowadays...

FEDJUKIN (*making notes*): Pub-lic-house...

NOVSKI: These are anecdotes. Surely they are of no consequence for your investigation.

FEDJUKIN: But for your biography, Boris Davidovič, they are, for instance, important. For your biography.

NOVSKI: Back then my identity papers said I was Bezrabotni.

FEDJUKIN (*logging this in*): Bez-rab-ot-ni...

NOVSKI: For several months I spent my nights with homeless people in a municipal bath that was under renovation at the time...

FEDJUKIN (*reading aloud*): Established links to a group of SR terrorists who were planning bomb attacks; arrested by the police while carrying papers in the name of B.D. Novski.

NOVSKI: That was the name of the night watchman at the baths...

It was the first name that occurred to me at the police station...

FEDJUKIN: Ah, you're following the example of L.N. Bronstein...

He assumed the name of one of his prison guards...Did you know about that?

NOVSKI: Of course. But it is a coincidence.

FEDJUKIN: I meant no offense. But I so have the impression that you...were looking for instance for Russian names.

NOVSKI: Common practice among revolutionaries. Without any other—

FEDJUKIN: Now, now. Please. I was just asking...Well then, where did we leave off...Aha....In the year 1914 you are transferred to the main prison camp at Vladimir.

NOVSKI: With shackles on my legs...You need not write that down. I only say it because—

FEDJUKIN (*making notes*): No, no, it's all important. For your biography so to speak...With shack-les-on-your-legs...Riiight...In Narym he escapes and drops out of sight for a while.

NOVSKI: I had a bad fever...In Narym they took off our chains. I managed to drag myself to a fishing boat I found on the river bank. It had no oars. And I have no idea how I found the strength, but I shoved off onto the water. Then I just let the strong current take the boat downriver...Naturally all of that is without significance. It sounds like something from another life.

Fedjukin makes a note of something in the file and, without looking at him, gives him a signal to continue. Novski, distracted, remains silent.

FEDJUKIN: Do go on.

NOVSKI: When dawn broke, with me sitting there in that boat, abandoned to the rapid currents of the river, I realized that the elements of nature—like human forces—do not obey dreams or curses. The maelstroms dragged me along for five more *versts* after they capsized the boat...I spent several hours in the ice-cold water, as if this were a reprise of our family legend. Next to the banks lay a thin layer of ice still...just like back when they hurled David Abramovič into the Dniepr.

Pause. Novski is reminiscing, while Fedjukin is writing.

NOVSKI: "Whoever has seen the present, has seen everything: that is what was in the remote past and it is what will happen in the future."

FEDJUKIN: That is an altogether too pessimistic conclusion, so to speak. The future is ahead of you, Boris Davidovič...A radiant future.

NOVSKI: Marcus Aurelius. *Meditations*.

FEDJUKIN: In that same year he was sentenced to six years in prison. This time under the name Jakov Mauzer, and on the charge of organizing a secret terrorist cell among the prisoners.

NOVSKI: In the Tomsk prison I heard three months of gut-wrenching screams and entreaties on the part of people being led away to their deaths. (*Stops for a moment.*) Like I heard one day here, too...

FEDJUKIN (*sternly*): We are talking now about for example the past. Continue.

NOVSKI: What more is there to say? In the shadow of the gallows we read essays by Antonio Labriola about the materialist conception of history... "Whoever has seen the present, has seen everything: that is what was in the remote past and it is what will happen in the future."

FEDJUKIN: After the attack on the life of Governor von Launitz, the police considered him dead.

NOVSKI: I went underground in Paris—

FEDJUKIN (*interrupting him*)—We're getting to that still...He escaped twice from prisons and once from forced labor...(*Lifts his eyes from the file.*) It would be interesting, Boris Davidovič, if you came out with a clear explanation to us once and for all about how you were able to come and go from jails like that in Tsarist times, with no further ado. It could be like a master class. Like school for us.

NOVSKI: Above all, the conditions that permitted that—

FEDJUKIN (*interrupting him*): Oh, no no no...We have no time for that now...Anyway, you wouldn't be able to pull that sort of thing nowadays. In addition, I am convinced, Boris Davidovič,

that you wouldn't make a run for it while facing revolutionary justice...Yes. I am convinced of it. Even if you could. Isn't that right?

Novski is silent.

FEDJUKIN: Very well then. I am, you see, convinced, for instance, that you wouldn't try to flee...And this prison is not like the Tsarist ones, Boris Davidovič. I'll bet we see eye-to-eye on that one.

Novski is silent.

FEDJUKIN: I'm truly sorry that we don't have time here to talk, so to speak, confidentially...But as the old saying goes: there'll be time, but we won't be here. (*Pause. Reading from the papers.*) The first time, he and his comrades broke through the wall of their cell...(*Looks up.*) What a grand idea, smashing through the wall of a cell....Hmm. OK...The second time he disappeared during a visit to the bath-house in the clothes of a guard, whom he left behind stark naked. (*Laughs.*) Left him there stark naked. Would you for example be capable, Boris Davidovič, of leaving me behind, naked as a jaybird like that? No, no...You wouldn't do that to me...I'm convinced of that, you see...Afterwards, taken into custody again and then another escape, across the border in a Jewish peasant's cart... Hmm. A two-wheeled Jewish peasant cart. Across the frontier...

NOVSKI: Via the well-known smugglers' byways in the area around Wilkomirsk...I changed into the clothing of an itinerant merchant.

FEDJUKIN (*jotting this down*): Vi-a-smug-glers'-by-ways...A most interesting detail...(*Writing.*) I-tin-er-ant-mer-chant...(*Reads aloud.*) He then lived with a forged passport under the name Mihail Vasiljevič Zemljanikov...

NOVSKI: In that period I was hidden by a number of doctors who were close to the SRs. I lived among their mental patients. Dangerous ones.

FEDJUKIN (*holds up his hand for Novski to pause, so that he can write all this down*): Dan-ger-ous-men-tal-pa-tients...Go on.

NOVSKI: I got out of there riding a bicycle, disguised as a high school student.

FEDJUKIN: You had obtained the signatures of two prominent doctors who confirmed that you (*his hand goes to the side of his head*) were a bit, for instance, disturbed.

NOVSKI: The police had those two doctors on their list as revolutionary sympathizers...But they had no evidence against them.

FEDJUKIN: No evidence, you say...Intriguing...No proof...(*Makes a note.*) Very well. You made it to Batumi, correct?

NOVSKI: Yes.

FEDJUKIN: In September 1913 you moved on to Paris.

NOVSKI: By way of Istanbul, concealed among...

Fedjukin motions for him to stop, while he catches up.

FEDJUKIN (*still writing*): By-way-of-Is-tan-bul...It's all important, Boris Davidovič...Every detail...Constantinople for example could not be considered a detail. It is so to say a major fact in your biography...You made your getaway, then, concealed—

NOVSKI: As a stowaway on a ship. Hidden among tons of eggs.

FEDJUKIN: Tons-of-eggs...So now we'd be in Paris. Here you were active with the influential labor union for Jewish hatmakers.

NOVSKI: I spent most of the time studying in the Russian library on the Avenue des Gobelins.

FEDJUKIN (*writing*): Av-en-ue...

NOVSKI: Des Gobelins.

FEDJUKIN (*writing*): Go-be-lins...

NOVSKI: And in the Musée Guimet. An excellent place to research the history of religion...

FEDJUKIN (*making notes*): Mu-sée...

NOVSKI: Guimet.

FEDJUKIN: Gui-met...

NOVSKI (*not without nostalgia*): And I spent my evenings at the bar Rotonde in Montparnasse...

FEDJUKIN: Par-nasse.

NOVSKI: After the outbreak of the war—

FEDJUKIN: That stuff is already in here...The Okhrana did that part with hairsplitting thoroughness...So. After war is declared, he

disappears from Paris. The police caught up with him in the vicinity of Mont-pel—

NOVSKI: Montpellier. To conceal my identity I took on as a day laborer for the grape harvest. When the two men in civilian clothes showed up in the vineyard, I had a huge basket of grapes in my arms. Before I could put it down, they came up to me, right there in the rows, and slapped the handcuffs on me.

FEDJUKIN (*after writing this down*): And then we're back in Berlin.

NOVSKI: I was expelled.

FEDJUKIN: Here it says: he escaped.

NOVSKI: No. I was just expelled, pure and simple.

FEDJUKIN: He-was-ex-pelled.

NOVSKI: They stuffed me into a train, with the cuffs still on my wrists, and then with no further ado: over the border. Farewell!

FEDJUKIN (*studying the file*): Here we find, for instance, a few unpleasanties...(*Glances up.*) In the years 1917 and 1918, you went against the Party line.

NOVSKI: I got carried away by a wave of national enthusiasm and was under the influence of the Kadets on certain questions of honesty and morality. I advocated a continuation of the war at any price...Especially at the time when victory was on the horizon.

FEDJUKIN: This does you no credit, for example. Not at all!

NOVSKI: I'll admit that the news of an armistice was a real blow to me, in spite of everything—

FEDJUKIN (*writing*): A-blooowww...

NOVSKI: I was, I admit, on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

FEDJUKIN: Ner-vous-break-down...

NOVSKI: However, I quickly made common cause, under the influence of the Bolsheviks, with the anti-war camp. All the more so after a conversation I had with Snaserov. I threw away my rapid-fire Mauser, and as a sign of repentance I burned all the plans I'd made for bombs and a flamethrower with a range of sixty meters. I became an internationalist.

FEDJUKIN (*scribbling quickly now*): Flame-throw-er...(*Looks at Novski.*) But you still have it all in here (*tapping his finger on his forehead*). Right here, Boris Davidovič. All these plans.

They can't be for instance erased by anybody. Not by anybody. (*Reflecting.*) Except by you yourself. Isn't that right, Boris Davidovič? Am I not right?

Novski remains silent.

FEDJUKIN: Very well. Let us proceed. (*Reading from a file.*) In 1918 you were in charge of grain convoys that were being dispatched to Moscow.

NOVSKI: Yes....Tula, Tambov, Oryol, Kharkov...

FEDJUKIN: The next year you were an anti-Denikin saboteur behind the lines.

NOVSKI: Denikin's units stumbled onto the well-camouflaged minefields we had created in the most unlikely places. It totally rattled them.

FEDJUKIN: At the end of November of that same year, you set out on board the torpedo boat *Spartacus* on an reconnaissance mission to Reval...

NOVSKI: Suddenly our boat crossed paths with a squadron of seven British light ships. They were armed with 25-mm cannon. Our torpedo boat executed a risky evasion maneuver and managed to reach, under the cover of advancing darkness, the harbor at Kronstadt...But it should be acknowledged that we gained quite a bit of time thanks to the cunning of Zinaida Mihajlovna—

FEDJUKIN: —Majsner.

NOVSKI: She's the one who communicated with the British by beacon and got them to believe that our change of course was the result of a defective mechanism. She was attempting to win time for us.

Fedjukin, who has been busily making jottings and corrections, enters these final words.

FEDJUKIN: Kronstadt...(Closing the file.) That's enough for today, Boris Davidovič...You see how nicely we work together? As the proverb goes, "Even stones will speak when you knock out their teeth." But for example we, Boris Davidovič, we have started working together quite congenially.

Goes to the door. A guard draws close to Novski and is about to slap handcuffs on him.

FEDJUKIN (*to the guard*): Never mind, never mind...Boris Davidovič is a man one can trust. (*In the doorway.*) But don't, for instance, do anything like that again. (*Points to his wrists.*) A revolutionary like you must always remain consistent to himself. To the very end. (*Pause.*) Your biography is for example immaculate. And it will remain immaculate...Without even the smallest so to speak shadow...

SCENE TWELVE

Novski and Zinaida Mihajlovna Majsner walk out of the main building of the sanatorium. (This is a continuation of Scene Ten.) Their conversation goes on.

NOVSKI: At age four I could already read and write. When I was nine, my father would take me to the Café Saratov, near the Jewish market, where I used a table in the corner, right next to the porcelain cuspidor, to carry out my functions as a hack lawyer. Do you understand? The people who frequented the place were retired Tsarist soldiers with flaming red beards and deep sockets around their eyes; and converted Jewish merchants from the neighboring shops, in the long grubby caftans and with Russian names that did not seem to match their Semitic gait. (Three thousand years of servitude and a long tradition of pogroms have produced this way of walking that is cultivated in ghettos.)

They took a seat on a bench on the terrace.

NOVSKI: The young Boris Davidovič composed their letters of complaint, because he could already write better than his father.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: Your life, Boris Davidovič, is a novel, pure and simple.

NOVSKI: At night his mother read Psalms to him in her lilting, nasally voice...When he was ten, an elderly overseer from one of the estates told him—in the same café—about the peasants'

uprising of 1846. In his narrative, knouts, sabers, and the gallows adjudicated right and wrong. At age thirteen I fell under the influence of Soloviev's Antichrist and ran away from home... At a distant train station I was apprehended and brought home with a police guard...*(Pause.)* I'm skipping several years here. I am just putting scenes here in a row, images, like out of a photo album. Now you find him at the marketplace, selling empty bottles for two kopecks apiece and also dealing in black-market tobacco, matches, and lemons. I must mention the fact that in that period my father had himself fallen under the ominous influence of the nihilists and brought his own family to the brink of ruin...(Dr. Grinvald would surely argue that tuberculosis contributed to all this, for he saw in that disease the symptoms of a treacherous organic nihilism.)

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: I would very much have liked to hear one of his talks.

NOVSKI (*as if he had not heard her*): At age fourteen, he was working as an apprentice in a kosher butcher shop, and later he did the dishwashing and cleaned the samovar in the same café where he'd previously written letters for people...At 16...

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: I'm sure you were already a man by then...

NOVSKI: At age 16, dear Zinaida Mihajlovna, I did have a truly manly job: sorting artillery shells in the arsenal in St. Petersburg—

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER (*stroking his hair*): You poor, unfortunate boy...

NOVSKI: At seventeen I was working as a longshoreman in Riga. During the strikes I read Leonid Andreyev⁴ and Scheller-Mikhailov⁵ during the strikes...

⁴ Leonid Andreyev (1871–1919) was a beloved Russian playwright and fiction writer who explored the lives of the working class and peasants, criminals and victims and soldiers, and sympathized with advocates of political change in Russia, though not necessarily with the Bolsheviks. He is best known in the anglophone world for the novella *The Seven Who Were Hanged* and the play about World War One, *The Sorrows of Belgium*.

⁵ A.K. (Alexander Konstantinovich) Scheller (1838–1900), also known under the pseudonym A. Mikhailov, or as Scheller-Mikhailov, was a Russian editor and author. He was a prolific novelist of “radical” stories about the developing intellect and consciousness, especially of Russian young people. He was a contemporary of Pisarev, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Chernyshevsky.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: Ah, Leonid Andreyev...I adore him.

NOVSKI: That same year, after losing my job on the docks, I switched over to the crating and packing company "Theodor Kibel". A famous outfit...And do you know what I earned there? Five *kopecks* a day...This is when the first signs of tuberculosis showed up.

He casts a glance at his pocket watch.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: My bags are ready, Boris Davidovič...I asked them to be brought here when it's time...

NOVSKI: You see, my story ate up all of our precious time...There are more sensible things for us to talk about.

ZINAIDA MIHAJLOVNA MEISSNER: Boris Davidovič, to me every one of your words is precious...It was that way before I got to know you in person...(She looks at her watch, which is encased in a brooch.) And we still have a whole hour...My train leaves at 8:40. Please continue. I want to know everything about you, everything.

NOVSKI: No sooner did I go off to university than I ended up in prison...They arrested me thirteen times, no more, no less. Of the twelve-year sentence I got for my first arrest, I actually did spend more than half of it at hard labor. In addition I had to travel three times that hard road into exile, something that cost me three years of my life...In the brief moments of "liberty" I watched everything go past me, like in a movie: wretched Russian villages, cities, people, events, with me forever on the move myself...by horse, ship, carriage. There was no bed in which I slept for longer than a month...I learned the horrors of Russian reality, in long, agonizing winter nights, when the wan lights of Vassiliev Island are reduced to tentative little blinks and the Russian village takes on a specious beauty in the moonlight. My only passion was for the craft of the revolutionary: hard, zealous, hidden.

The servants show up with Zinaida Mihajlovna's travel bags and suitcases. They both feel they've been caught at something, like two lovers who failed to say the right things to each other.

*They both stand up all of a sudden, as if by arrangement.
They embrace deeply, without saying a word and with no farewell kiss.*

NOVSKI: Forgive me, Zina, and keep a place for me in your heart...
It will be painful, like suffering from a stone in the kidneys...
Adieu!

*Zinaida Mihajlovna puts on her hat, fastens it under her chin, and
moves off, following the servants carrying her luggage.
Novski stands there with his hat in his hand, motionless. He looks after her.
She does not turn around.*

SCENE THIRTEEN

*Late at night. Fedjukin is in his office, alone. On his desk: a samovar,
now cool, various telephones, file folders. The ashtray is full of butts.
A cigarette haze is in the air.*

*Fedjukin types slowly, using two fingers, on an old-fashioned typewriter.
The way he hammers at the keys sounds like short bursts from an auto-
matic weapon.*

*The door is flung open and two guards lead Novski into the room. They
are supporting him by the arms. Novski has a bandage on his head. He
is in such pitiful condition that he can hardly stand.*

*The guards literally plant him in front of Fedjukin's desk and retreat
to the corner after removing his handcuffs. Fedjukin keeps on typing,
never raising his eyes, as if he had not seen or heard anything.*

*Then he pulls the page out of the typewriter and sounds out the words he
has just written.*

*Only then does he turn to face Novski, utterly casually, so that what he
says sounds like an addition to his typed text.*

FEDJUKIN: I believe you'll be satisfied with this...Look here. (*Tap-
ping his finger on the papers.*) We changed the indictment
around completely...For instance, at your request...And so this
time, according to your wish, if we understood you correctly,
you were born in 1893 (I'm taking the middle date), your last
posting was in Kazakhstan in the headquarters of the Postal

and Telegraph Service, etc., etc. I'm skipping parts here. I declare, in full consciousness and being of sound mind, etc., etc. You know that part...Aha! That I received the first sum—we still have to come to terms about how much it was—from A.D. Paresijan, let's say on the 8th of May, 1925, when I was working with him in the cable factory in Novosibirsk.

Looks over at Novski to gauge the impact of his words. Novski can barely stay upright.

FEDJUKIN: As for Paresijan (*starts rummaging through the files*), we should have...ah, yes. Here you go, for example. It's in black and white, signed, that he paid you two thousand Canadian dollars...Regarding the sum of money, as I said, we're still going to talk about that, for instance...It's not all that large a sum. (*Pause, observing Novski.*) Once again you've made things more difficult for yourself, Boris Davidovič... Haven't I so to speak met you halfway? Hm? Haven't I? Didn't I rewrite the indictment at your explicit request, turning this issue of spying for the English into—out of affectionate respect for your past—a completely run-of-the-mill human affair, involving the sum of two thousand dollars? Or let's go with one thousand, or, all right, even five hundred Canadian dollars. What more do you want from me?... Excuse me, I can't hear you. (*Hunches down in his armchair, looking like a broken man, disillusioned and betrayed.*) You are not an honorable man, Boris Davidovič...I say this with complete conviction. You are not an honorable man...And then there's the matter of your promising me, so to speak, that you wouldn't try to do yourself in again, and now this...your head against the wall...So, what would've happened if you for example had pulled it off? Right now, when we've broken out of our impasse, so to speak...You wanted to keep your biography as clean as a whistle. You didn't spy for England. Fine. I accommodated that, and we explained the matter away... Paresijan put his signature on a statement and got 500 ml of vodka as a reward...(What do you expect? The man is disillusioned with life and as we know alcohol helps us get through

the really hard times.) Well, all right, you're not like Paresijan. Did you think that I wouldn't know what makes you different?...Like heaven and earth, as it were...But the comparison, Boris Davidovič, does not always work to your benefit, for instance...In contrast to you, Paresijan is conscious of his duty...Yes, yes, his duty. He remembers not only the money, but also the year and even the day that he gave it to you...And you? You demanded to be named the leader of the conspiracy...and I, for example, fulfilled your wish.

Suddenly Novski slides to the floor.

The guards run over to him, as does Fedjukin. He bends over to look at Novski, listens for his heartbeat, and takes his pulse. He then gives him artificial respiration and slaps him across the face to bring him back to consciousness. When Novski remains inert, Fedjukin slaps him over and over in blind rage.

FEDJUKIN (*continuing to slap Novski*): It would be just like this guy to kick the bucket at this moment, when we finally have Paresijan's confession...Because he just has to prove his own innocence, so that in this fucking pathological egotism of his he can keep his truth intact...the so-called truth...his truth...

He is on the verge of hysteria. A guard goes to his side and tries to pull him away from Novski.

GUARD: Valerij Josipovič, let us take him to the "doghouse"...We'll take care of him all right. If you keep on like that, you could kill him, Valerij Josipovič...kill him...

They succeed in separating him from Novski. Fedjukin straightens his uniform and, trembling, walks over to his desk. He pulls open a drawer, takes out a bottle of vodka, pours himself a full glass, and drains it in one gulp. While the guards lead Novski away, Fedjukin continues to talk, as if to himself.

FEDJUKIN: This perpetual running in circles with so-called facts...As if I didn't know what facts are...A fact is that (*pours again and drinks*) which people agree to declare as a fact, for instance. And not (*pours more and drinks*) merely things that

THE MECHANICAL LIONS

are contained within the confines of a thick, hard skull. This blind truth of theirs, founded on "facts", cannot, however, be integrated into, for example, a system of higher values...

He stands up to open the door for the guards, who are hauling Novski behind them.

FEDJUKIN: A system of higher justice...(Screams.) Higher justice, isn't that obvious? (*Grabs a guard by the collar.*) Do you see?

GUARD: Understood, Comrade Prosecutor, understood...Higher justice.

FEDJUKIN: Which requires that one bring it sacrifices and which neither cares to, nor is allowed to, take account of human weaknesses.

He's still gripping the guard by the collar, even though he's now talking to himself again.

GUARD (*frightened*): I follow you, Comrade Prosecutor. There is no consideration for human weakness.

SCENE FOURTEEN

The banks of the Dniepr, 1885. In the background a wagon with unhitched horses, and, next to them, saddles. In one corner of the stage, long Cossack rifles, are leaning together in a pyramid. The campfire is just about out.

It's a foggy, ice-cold dawn.

From behind we hear noise, including soldiers' shouts, and then suddenly there is just silence and the sound of water: it is Prince Vjazemski, who has leapt into the icy flow and pulled out the silver cross.

A soldier, assigned to unsaddle and groom the horses, looks on in breathless excitement. In one hand he's holding the curry-comb, in the other a brush.

A sudden stillness, then loud cries: Hurrah! Hurrrrraaaaah!

Wrapped in a blanket, his hair wet, Prince Vjazemski comes onto the scene; he is accompanied by a group of officers and soldiers. He's holding the silver cross high above his head. We hear the clanking of sabers. From the opposite side of the stage, two soldiers bring up a crate of cognac.

Prince Vjazemski distributes the bottles to the officers and soldiers. They uncork them and drain them in one go.

Then they move offstage, shouting. An accordion begins playing. All that remains on stage are the empty crates of cognac. And, in the background, the horses. Next to the horses a soldier reclines with a book in his hand.

An officer, already in his cups, appears. He whistles while he throws a bottle of liquor to the soldier who has gotten to his feet to salute. The soldier picks up the bottle. He set it unopened on the ground next to him, and keeps reading; his lips move as he does so, making it seem as though he were only half-literate.

The bell in a church in a nearby village begins to ring. Then the singing of hymns reaches us: "Rejoice, o Virgin Theotokos."

Robust male voices.

When the song and the ringing cease, the soldier stands back up, puts both hands around the book, and repeats, eyes closed, what he had just read in the Talmud.

The soldier who was grooming the horses is none other than David Abramovič, the father of Boris Davidovič.

DAVID ABRAMOVIČ: "God loves three kinds of people: those who are not inclined to anger, those who love freedom, and those whose souls are free of malice."

A group of soldiers walks past, looking at him.

FIRST SOLDIER: There's David Abramovič prostrating himself.

David Abramovič is wrapped up in his reading and does not notice them.

FIRST SOLDIER: Why is it, David Abramovič, that you didn't drink the cognac, for instance?

They walk up to him.

SECOND SOLDIER It's a gift from Prince Vjazemski, who just brought up the silver cross from the Dniepr. And it's the gift of our Tsar (*he bows*)...May God protect him...

DAVID ABRAMOVIČ (*holding out the bottle to them*): Take it. I don't drink.

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FIRST SOLDIER: This is a present from the Tsar. You have to drink it.

A new group of soldiers, along with an officer, comes over.

FIRST SOLDIER (*standing at attention before the officer*): The soldier David Abramovič is rejecting the favor shown by the Tsar.

OFFICER (*having understood everything and now taking the bottle and handing it back to David Abramovič, who is now standing at attention as well*): Drink it!

David Abramovič takes the bottle and then drops his arm to his side. He says nothing.

OFFICER (*shouting at him*): Drink it!

Abramovič remains at attention, though his head is now hanging low. The officer makes a sign to the soldiers.

OFFICER: Baptize him! Immediately.

The soldiers gang up on Abramovič. They knock him to the ground and pour cognac down his throat.

Afterwards they strip him to the waist, bind reins around his hips, tie him behind a horse, and drag him off the stage. The sound of splashing water is audible as they dunk him in it. They are singing "Rejoice, o Virgin Theotokos."

Tied once more to the horse, they drag him back, soaked and unconscious—and leave him lying on the ground next to the horses.

They depart. One soldier remembers the bottle and holds it up. There is still some cognac in it.

He grabs Abramovič by the hair and pours the liquid brutally down his throat.

SCENE FIFTEEN

Novski lies on the floor in his cell. The guard grabs him by the hair and pours the water brutally down his throat.

Slowly Novski opens his eyes. He is wearing a straitjacket.

GUARD (*to Fedjukin, standing off to the side*): He's opening his eyes...Everything is in order, Comrade Prosecutor.

*Fedjukin signals for the guard to leave.
He leans over Novski.*

FEDJUKIN: Look at the trouble you're causing, Boris Davidovič.

Novski attempts to sit up.

FEDJUKIN: You know what, Boris Davidovič? You are tormenting me with your egotism,...Please, don't protest...You are selfish, very for instance selfish...You are making our procedure terribly difficult, terribly, Boris Davidovič...For days now I haven't been able to sleep on your account...And I have to tell you, even if you think it offensive: your selfishness, Boris Davidovič, has germinated from flattery and praise...Long years of flattery. Boris Davidovič this, Boris Davidovič that. Boris Davidovič, please. Boris Davidovič, here you are...Yes, indeed. And so your egotism grew and grew. And outstripped your sense of duty.

Fedjukin picks up the bottle and pours water into the other man's mouth.

FEDJUKIN: Take a little refreshment, Boris Davidovič...Riiiiight... A bit more...So. Now everything's all right, you see?...As the old saying goes: "Cold water, clear head."

Straightens him up like a sick child. The guard helps him lean the sitting Novski against the wall. Fedjukin then motions him away. One hears the door being opened and then shut. The hinges creak.

FEDJUKIN: Look, I made something for you, Boris Davidovič. *(Pulls a document from his interior jacket pocket.)* Here you go...I think you'll be quite satisfied with this...Everything is the way you wanted it. No spying for England, no betrayal of your homeland to foreigners...I completely acquiesced in your wishes, for example...I understand completely, see? This is a civilian matter. No espionage. No treason. *(Reads.)* In his testimony, Paresijan...aha: "The first sum of 1,500 Canadian dollars," you see, a completely inconsequential sum. "I received from a certain Paresijan," etc., etc., "who for his part had obtained the money from Berlin as a gratuity for certain

arrangements that I had made for foreign firms, above all Canadian and American ones." So, really now, what's so terrifying about this?...We're simply talking about favors among friends, so to speak. That cannot put any dark clouds over your biography, Boris Davidovič. So I think you can be happy with it this way, no? Speak up, Boris Davidovič...So we can finally be done with this...The affair is as easy as pie, as they say: Paresijan will remind you of details that you have, logically enough, forgotten...After all, it's already been five or six years. And you, an educated man, were in the meantime occupied with other things; it's been washed from your memory, as if it had never happened...Isn't that so? People, you see, love forgetting certain things. Or they just forget them automatically....But fortunately we have Paresijan...(Stands up, knocks on the door to the cell. Paresijan is led in.)

Paresijan is about fifty years of age. He is slightly drunk.

PARESIJAN (*bowing*): At your service, citizen Prosecutor.

FEDJUKIN: Boris Davidovič wanted to see you.

PARESIJAN (*embarrassed*): I understand, citizen Prosecutor....?

FEDJUKIN (*crudely*): So tell him hello, you moron. That's what you do to old friends.

PARESIJAN (*understands at last and turns to Novski*): Ah, so that's you, Boris Davidovič...Forgive me, but I didn't recognize you right away...The light is behind you, sort of...

He draws close to Novski and tries to shake his hand. Only now does he see that Novski has on a straitjacket.

PARESIJAN: You haven't changed a bit in these past five years... Truth to tell, Boris Davidovič! Granted, you are a little gaunt, just a touch. It's barely noticeable. Here (*touching his own jaw*), in the face, but otherwise not at all...You are still the same Boris Davidovič that you were back when we worked in Novosibirsk...Ah, those were the days...Do you remember Valerija Ivanovna? A true beauty. Those eyes, my God, what eyes...

FEDJUKIN: That's of no consequence, for instance, now.

PARESIJAN (*recoils*): I understand, citizen Prosecutor....(*To Novski.*) Yes, yes. The good old days...And as for that money, look here, Boris Davidovič: I confessed to everything....And I think, Boris Davidovič—

He stops suddenly.

FEDJUKIN: Paresijan!

PARESIJAN: Esteemed Boris Davidovič, I beg you—I —

He begins sobbing like a drunk: sincerely, abjectly.

Fedjukin approaches him and shakes him violently.

FEDJUKIN: You miserable cur! (*Screams.*) Guard! Off to the doghouse with him! Immediately!...And the other one too. To the doghouse!

SCENE SIXTEEN

A Jewish home at the close of the 19th century. Sitting on the bed, naked to the waist, is David Abramovič, the soldier. Next to him is a young woman; she is rubbing a goose feather dunked in cod-liver oil over the man's back. His skin is full of wounds inflicted by the blows of a whip. The girl's father is sitting nearby. A bearded old Jew, he's reading the Talmud. Her mother, a heavyset Jewish woman with a wig, is kneading dough. She wears a wig.

THE GIRL: Those scoundrels! Those villains!

DAVID ABRAMOVIČ: "The world exists thanks to/is maintained by the breath of innocent children..." *Ner tamid*.⁶

THE FATHER (*who heard him*): "Sincere regret is worth more than a whip on one's own body," as it says in the *Berakhot*.⁷

THE GIRL (*outraged by the soldier's wounds*): Those villains!

DAVID ABRAMOVIČ (*standing up*): May the Lord show you his favor.

He puts on his shirt. The girl holds his coat for him.

⁶ *Ner tamid* (Hebrew) means "everlasting fire" or "eternal flame." It is also the name of the sanctuary lamp in temples or synagogues.

⁷ The *Berakhot* are blessings or prayers of thanksgiving found in the Talmud.

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THE MOTHER: Why must you leave so soon, *Herr Abramovič*?

DAVID ABRAMOVIČ: May the Lord protect you. (*Bows to them.*)

THE MOTHER: Hana, escort him out...

The girl drapes a shawl over her shoulders.

In front of the door:

DAVID ABRAMOVIČ (*in a whisper*): I will come back. I swear to you by everything that I hold dear...I'll come back if I'm alive.

They exchange a hasty and awkward embrace.

THE GIRL: May Yahweh, the Almighty, keep you...I will wait for you!

SCENE SEVENTEEN

The guard shakes Novski, who is lying on the floor of the prosecutor's office.

GUARD: Get up, you lowlife!

Novski stands up, wobbly.

FEDJUKIN: Well, how are we today, Boris Davidovič?

Novski is silent.

FEDJUKIN: Look, you're only hurting yourself, for instance.

Fedjukin retrieves from a drawer a piece of salami and some bread, along with a jar of pickles. He unfolds a newspaper and begins to eat. He eats for the duration of this scene. He eats slowly, cutting up the bread with a razor blade in peasant fashion. He's drinking vodka with the food, and talking with his mouth full.

FEDJUKIN: You see, Isak Isaijevič confessed to everything.

NOVSKI: I don't want to incriminate him...I already told you. As for my part in this affair, agreed, I'll confess to everything. All of it. But—Isak Isaijevič—I do not wish to lay this on him.

FEDJUKIN (*his mouth full*): Here. (*Holds out a piece of paper to him across the table.*) See here—he admitted everything. It's in

black and white. *Auf schwarz*. Is that how you say it? In black and white? Please, take a good look at it. All nice and signed. Isak Rabinovič. Read it.

Novski holds the paper in his hand. He balks.

FEDJUKIN: Damn it all! Read it, I said! Out loud, so I can hear it.

NOVSKI: "I, the undersigned I. I. Rabinovič, professor, born..."

FEDJUKIN (*his mouth full*): You can skip that part. Start on page seven.

Novski turns the pages.

NOVSKI: "...I was an intellectual mentor of sorts to Boris Davidovič, known as Novski, since our distant days in Pavlograd...As a scientist and a technical expert, I recognized his undisputed technical talent, something of which I am still proud, and I initiated him to the secret processes pertaining to the production of explosives." (*Stops.*)

FEDJUKIN: Just go on.

NOVSKI: "To his irregular but no less brilliant studies, I contributed in a number of ways...Above all I supplied him with advice and articles and books in the field, and, in addition, I also saved him numerous times. I intervened—using the credibility I had then—with the state prosecutor and vouched for the young Boris Davidovič. I made certain guarantees. But I must admit that the diabolical effects of certain explosions that rocked St. Petersburg in that period prompted in me the justifiable suspicion that Boris Davidovič, and no one else, was behind them. These horrific explosions, which came to pass in mysterious and unexpected ways, left behind scenes worthy of an *abattoir*. And they bore Novski's stamp, much as a manuscript bears the stamp or signature of the master..."

FEDJUKIN: You see? Nothing but compliments. Now continue.

Novski pages through the rest of the report and examines the final pages.

FEDJUKIN: Please, please. There are no secrets here. Why the impatience?

NOVSKI: Why did you have to involve that unfortunate old man in this business? Why? Why? Oh, why?

FEDJUKIN (*his mouth full*): Ah, Boris Davidovič, sure you, for instance, don't believe that we tortured the old man?... Uh-uh...Your mistrust is really insufferable...Yes, yes, offensive. But look, I am, for example, tolerant...Have I shown you the indictment against you yet? Hm? Have I?

NOVSKI: I cannot incriminate Rabinovič...I can't. That is beyond my powers. I cannot, cannot, cannot...And how, damn it—and by that I mean what methods did you use—how did you get this upstanding man to lie?

FEDJUKIN: Oh, but those are strong words, Boris Davidovič! Lies, lies...Do you really believe that there is such a clear dividing line between the truth and a lie? Here's white truth, and there's the black lie? ...Come on now. The old man just recalled a few occurrences...That's all.

NOVSKI: He was like a father to me...

FEDJUKIN (*waves dismissively, his mouth full again*): We know about that stuff, Boris Davidovič...The old saw about the idealized father, or the revelation of our secret dreams through a young man in whom we recognize our own features...It's all totally natural, for example. And quite human, of course.

NOVSKI: Nonetheless I cannot sign this portion of the indictment, Citizen Prosecutor. It's not within my power.

FEDJUKIN: But by not doing so, it would mean that you're accusing your intellectual father of lying. Yes, yes, of regular old lying. Here he asserts, and then confirms it with a signature in his own hand, that he worked with you on the production of explosives...Isn't that true, for instance? And now you want to act rashly and force him to lie?

NOVSKI: There are elements of truth in that, but—

FEDJUKIN: Aha! You see!

NOVSKI: But there are some chronological inconsistencies here... When I borrowed books about explosives from him, I was a young student, but here it says...

FEDJUKIN (*wraps the bread and sausage back up in the newspaper, closes the lid on the jar of pickles, sweeps the crumbs from the table*).

Suddenly changes his tone): The trial of the group of saboteurs is taking place in one more week...There's no more time for games. See here. This is my final concession. (*Picks up a file and walks with it over to the cast-iron stove in the corner of the room.*) So, we'll just burn this up and be done with it. There is no more spying, no Canadian money, nothing...There you go... (*Throws sheets of paper into the stove.*) There. You see? Now we can burn this. (*Throws more sheets into the stove.*) So, all that's left now is: the group of conspirators that was subverting the system. And was manufacturing explosives to be used in sabotage...There's nothing for example dishonorable about that. I'm going to leave you by yourself now. Yes, here...Sit right down in my chair. It's already warmed up for you. Learn your role by heart...This is my final condition and my final concession...

He locks the desk drawer and departs.

FEDJUKIN (*from the door*): Any typographical errors you find, for example, you can correct with no further ado...As well as details that seem illogical to you...And of course the part about trinitrotoluene and other things related to your specialty. For you, Boris Davidovič, for heaven's sake, you are a technical genius...Rabinovič maintains as much, too...You don't need to worry about him...His testimony got his daughter out of a real jam. She was, namely, just between us...You know what I mean...And, besides, she had gotten mixed up in a spy case...Cheers! And good luck to you!

He leaves the room. The guard remains standing in the corner. Novski sits down at the desk and starts to type, slowly at first, and then faster and faster as if delirious.

SCENE EIGHTEEN

The interior of a camp barrack. A group of about ten real criminals (robbers, etc.), loaf about in the upper bunks..” One of them has retrieved a homemade knife from under his thin straw mattress and is whetting it on

the metal fittings of the bunk-bed. This rhythmic and monotone sound of a knife being sharpened is audible throughout this scene. Four “bandits”, sitting two apiece on neighboring bunks, are playing cards. The cards make a slapping noise on the board that’s been laid between the bunks. Segidulin, naked to the waist, and with a tattoo of a masturbating monkey on his hairless chest, turns his blood-rimmed eyes on Koršunidze, who sports a tattoo of an eagle on his own chest. Other “criminals” are sitting close to the stove. Obscene tattoos are to be found not only on their chests but also on their backs, upper arms, and hands.

On the lower bunks lie the “politicals”. A young inmate calls out in agony out for his mother; sometimes he whispers, but sometimes he screams in feverish delirium. Snaserev, Dr. Taube, and Kaurin are whispering to each other.

Outside a purga⁸ is raging; the window is almost completely covered by piled-up snow. The wind gusts as if possessed, and it continues to deposit new drifts of snowflakes until finally the window is totally snowed in.

DR. TAUBE (*listening carefully to the storm outside*): Three years ago I treated him for scurvy...He lost all his teeth at that time.

SNASEREV: Then he had crowns put in. Stainless steel...I hardly recognized him the next time I saw him.

KAURIN (*after a violent squall passes*): If those maggots don’t send us out to work, it’s not because of the storm. It’s because of the runaways.

KRUMINŠ (*one of the bandits who’s been watching the game of cards and who now leans down to where the “politicals” are*): Shut the fuck up!

In the silence that suddenly ensues, we can hear Segidulin slap a card down onto the board. He keeps it covered with his enormous hairy hand. Even the criminal who is sharpening his knife stops momentarily. Then he continues grinding the blade against the metal.

KAURIN (*voice lowered, continues*): Before seeing him this time, the last time was when he left for London...At that time he was merely a *member* of the delegation...At the point of his arrest he was working on the executive board of the People’s Commissariat for Postal and Telegraph Services. In Kazakhstan.

⁸ A severe Siberian blizzard.

KRUMINŠ (*bending down*): Shut the fuck up when I tell you to! (*To Segidulin, who still has his hand over the card.*): They're having a Party conference down there...

SEGIDULIN (*to Kruminš*): Can it! Čalavdo!

Kruminš falls quiet temporarily.

GADJAŠVILI (*the "criminal" who is whetting his knife blade, to Kruminš*): Čindano? Eh?

SEGIDULIN: Let'em be...You can see that they're saying a prayer for the dead...(*Leans down himself.*) When this snow melts, you'll find him...And you'll recognize him by the stainless steel dentures in that skull of his.

The criminals laugh.

KORŠUNIDZE (THE EAGLE): Come on, monkey, forget them. Deal already! (*Leans over.*) And you all down there: sing the "Internationale" for him and then shut the fuck up!

The criminals laugh.

KORŠUNIDZE (*to his comrades*): Marav džjuven, marav džjuven!

The criminals look down at the politicals and laugh uncontrollably. Then they are quiet again. In reverential silence they stare at their cards.

KAURIN: The state prosecutor tried not to run his name down during the trial....

SNASEREV: He even referred to him as a "true revolutionary" and for his moral deviations he found a "scientific explanation"—

KAURIN: A dialectical one—

SNASEREV: By pointing out the harmful influences deriving from his frequent sojourns in the West.

KAURIN: Before he came here, he was in Turgaj...the back of beyond.

DR. TAUBE: This winter his sister received permission to visit him...Novski was complaining of kidney pain. He already had those steel dentures...

GADJAŠVILI: Shut up, you Commissars! Put a fucking cork in it! (*Calls up to the others.*) Čalavdo?

KORŠUNIDZE (THE EAGLE): Majpalal, majpalal!

GADJAŠVILI: Just say the word.

The card game continues, with some of the men playing and others kibitzing.

DR. TAUBE (*lowering his voice*): Those curs...Novski rejected her demand that he try to arrange permission to transfer to Moscow.

SNASEREV: He didn't want to face the world.

KAURIN: I understand that. I completely understand that.

SNASEREV: I met him in the corridor, right after his trial. I told him: "Boris Davidovič, I fear you've gone over the edge...Your plea is going to send us all to the grave." He gave me a very odd look, with just a hint of a smile. "Surely you must be familiar with the burial rites of the Jews," he said back to me. "At the moment you are preparing to carry the deceased out of the synagogue and take him to the cemetery, the servant of the Lord leans over the dead man and—"

GADJASHVILI (*leaning down, nonchalantly*): Put a sock in it, Commissars!

SNASEREV (*his voice slightly lowered*): "—leans over the dead man, calls him by name, and proclaims for all to hear: 'Know that you are dead!'" Then Novski paused for a moment before adding: "A most excellent custom."

DR. TAUBE: He was expecting to die in the early morning hours, a time that he solemnly associated with his own arrest. On that earlier occasion, he had turned to stone, staring glassy-eyed at the door, which he had made no attempt to lock...This time, when 3 a.m. came and went, he picked up his guitar and simply sang a few unintelligible songs.

GADJAŠVILI: Doctor, shut the fuck up when I tell you to shut the fuck up!

KORŠUNIDZE (THE EAGLE): Everybody shut up! All of you!...You too, Gadjašvili. *Majpalal!*

Everyone falls silent.

SEGIDULIN (THE MONKEY TO THE EAGLE): You sure are on edge today.

KORŠUNIDZE (THE EAGLE): *Barekanéngo!* Your left hand is gonna slide right in other people's pockets now, monkey. As it is,

there's nothing but stubs left on it...Let's go. (*Throws down his card.*) *Barekanéngo!*

SEGIDULLIN (*looking at the dirty bandage on his left hand*): Eagle, let's talk about this later! (*Lays his own card on the table and covers it with his hand.*) *Barekanéngo.*

KORŠUNIDZE (THE EAGLE): Left or right?

SEGIDULLIN (*nervously*): Show your card. Open your beak, bird.

Suddenly we can hear the wild barking of the German shepherds and the shadows of the guards as they run past the window.

DR. TAUBE (*goes to the window*): I can't see anything.

SEGIDULLIN: You sons of bitches! *Guruvnjori!* Knock it off! Damn commissars! They'll be stringing up your *barimata* on the front gate by tomorrow.

DR. TAUBE (*to his companions*): I don't think they caught him... They were making too much of a fuss for that...

SEGIDULLIN: I told you to can it!...*Gadjašvili, čindano!*

Gadjašvili stops whetting his knife for a moment.

SEGIDULIN (*screaming*): *Čindano! Čindano!* (*To Taube.*) And you, get lost! Move it! Get away from that window.

KORŠUNIDZE: Don't be afraid! *Ma dara, ma dara!*

SEGIDULIN (*to Gadjašvili*): *Čindano!* Didn't you understand me, you son of a bitch? *Čindano!*

Gadjašvili is holding the knife in his hand, undecided.

KORŠUNIDZE: *Ma dara!* Now you're all mine. *Ma dara!*

Segidulin jumps up from his bunk and dashes towards Gadjašvili.

GADJAŠVILI: *Čindano!* (*Throws the knife over to Koršunidze.*)

Koršunidze, holding the freshly sharpened knife, advances on Segidulin, who pulls up the plank with the cards to defend himself.

Gadjašvili sneaks up on him and grabs his arms from behind.

Suddenly the light goes off. A scream is heard. Curses, too. Then the thud of a falling body.

These noises overlap with the wild barking of dogs outside.

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SCENE NINETEEN

Assembly yard of the camp. A wooden barrack with a heavy layer of snow on it stands close by. There's also a barbed-wire fence (laced with snow). Guards with German Shepherds are running to and fro across the stage. A blizzard howls. The dogs bellow, and yank their masters from left to right. The floodlights illuminate an enormous vat. Novski is leaning against it. He has a beard and looks like a ghost.

FIRST GUARD: Get him!

The guards shout, and whistles blow. The dogs lunge free. A second guard cocks his rifle and takes aim at Novski, who is climbing up the iron ladder.

SECOND GUARD: Halt! Or I'll shoot! Halt, you son of a bitch!

THIRD GUARD: Wait! Don't shoot...There's nowhere for him to go.

Novski is standing on the top of the vat, in which a glowing hot liquid mass is seething. His face is lit up by the flames.

A guard is climbing up to him.

GUARD: Halt! Where are you trying to go? Stoooooooooooooop, I tell you...There's nowhere to go! (*Screaming.*) You have nowhere to gooooooooo!

SECOND GUARD (*eyes locked on Novski*): He's going to jump into the boiling dross...He'll be gone without a trace...Halt! Stay where you are!

More guards rush up with their dogs, along with Dr. Taube and some officers.

DR. TAUBE: Boris Davidovič—hey, Boris Davidovič. This is Dr. Taube...Listen to me...Come down, man. Right away. Come back down.

Novski doesn't move, but he seems to be thinking of raising a hand in greeting.

Then suddenly he leaps from the edge of the vat into the maw of the volcano.

The dogs are barking like mad...Shortly thereafter the camp sirens go off,

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all the lights go up, and floodlights emblaze the barbed-wire fence and the inmates.

The camp commandant arrives, trench coat over his shoulders.

GUARD (*giving a report, while he restrains the furious dog on a leash*): He leapt into the boiling dross...and he disappeared... Only a thin wisp of smoke came rising up. (*To the dog.*) Quiet! Quiet!

CAMP COMMANDANT (*bellowing*): Fall in!...Fall in! (*Running around the stage, shouting.*) Get into line, you bastards! All of you!

Suddenly the lights go out, including the floodlights.

Only from behind the bulging metal wall of the enormous vat does a single red flame leap up, flaring like a volcanic explosion.

Curtain. An iron one.

FALSE EPILOGUE

After the end of the show, two newspaper boys burst into the theater itself (not the stage) and shout out:

—The *Times*! The *Times*! Latest edition!

—Get your copy of the *Times* here!

—Novski seen in Moscow! Get your copy here!

These copies of the Times are dated October 26, 1956.

Between the articles on events in Hungary, we read, on page 1, the following brief news item in a black-framed box:

B.D. NOVSKI SIGHTED IN MOSCOW

(Reuters) *From usually well-informed sources in Moscow we have learned that the once famous Soviet revolutionary and diplomat B.D. Novski has been seen recently in the vicinity of the Kremlin. Eyewitnesses reported recognizing him by his stainless-steel dentures. Mr. Novski was sentenced to death in a rigged trial in 1930. Thanks to the intervention of the English trade unions the punishment was commuted to a long prison term and internal exile. Since that time there's been no*

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trace of him. Until five days ago. At that time a diplomat (who wishes to remain anonymous) spotted him hard by the Kremlin. Mr. Novski served in a number of important Party and administrative posts before his arrest. Among other things he was the diplomatic representative to Afghanistan and Finland. He was called the "Bolshevik Hamlet" on account of his intellectual brilliance. According to the statement of the diplomat in question, Mr. Novski, although visibly aged, still gave the impression of spryness. He was seen feeding pigeons, holding bread out to them on his palm.

(The audience buys the newspapers at today's price.)

THE END

ELECTRA

(AFTER EURIPIDES)

To Antonin Artaud



CHARACTERS

ELECTRA

ORESTES

PYLADES (A MUTE)

THE MASON

STROPHIUS

AEGISTHUS

CLYTEMNESTRA

CHORUS, SERVANTS



FIRST SCENE

First Electra, then the Mason.

(Daybreak. In the background the walls of the city are visible, along with a mountainous landscape outside the walls.)

ELECTRA: Oh, black night, cradle of black day!

See how dawn bursts betimes
and I rush into the market-day throng
amidst garrulous women and cunning middlemen.
There is no woe that has driven me forth so
from my home into the morning freshness,
nor do I cast about as a good-for-nothing
but as one desperate to try to be,
in roadside loneliness
and amidst crowds, that harshest of solitudes,

closer to the gods,
that I might complain to them about the furies of frenetic
Aegisthus.

Therefore my tear-filled eyes and my cry of longing
I raise to my deceased father and to the great heavens
to relay to them my sorrows:

how my mother,
that un-mother,
that manic daughter of Tyndareus,
cast me out of my childhood home,
out of the court of my father, now dead.

And how owing to her love
for an arrogant man,
Aegisthus, my stepfather,—
whom she has born other children,
leaving Orestes, my brother, and me unlucky—
we are strangers in this house,
the very place of our birth,
like foreigners or scabrous kittens!

THE MASON: Do not torment yourself on my account.

Your hands are not rough enough
for this rough work.

I know you're not accustomed as our women are
to early risings—

you, who grew up in the court,
at the hands of careful nurses!

Why not find refuge away from the eyes of the world?

That would be better for you and for me.

ELECTRA: My torments you will lighten

if you permit me to help you
and share with you the burden of daily life.

You have enough errands in the city itself,
therefore allow me at least to divide with you the work around
the house

(though I'm not yet schooled in it);

think of the joy for you:

in you come from working

and the house is in order, the meal set out,
the fragrance of olive oil rising.

THE MASON: Yes, the house in order, the table set,
the fragrance of olive oil rising...

Yes, all is well. Now go on—

ELECTRA: I don't understand!

THE MASON: I said to continue!

You stopped at "olive oil rising."

ELECTRA (*upset*):

I don't understand!

THE MASON: Fine. I'll take it from here:

the scent of olive oil rising,
and the tired mason returns from work,
burnt by the fierce sun on his scaffold...

ELECTRA: I don't understand!

THE MASON: Burnt by the sun...

(I already said that)

Darkened by hard day-laboring,
coarsened by iron, bricks,
and with wrinkles long and doleful,
I dry up like a field's furrow
when the white heat comes searing.

ELECTRA: I don't understand!

THE MASON: Thus I stand by day

atop the scaffolding but between two hells,
the inferno that is earth and that of the sun,
and while other masons do sing,
I howl like a wolf;

when sitting in the shade they recite
or compose their sad Ionian poems
(for the sun is already inclining to the west
and the joy of return has occupied them),

I start crushing rocks,
so that the stone sucks from me whatever juices
the sun hasn't yet stolen...

ELECTRA: I don't understand. Woe is me that I don't understand!

THE MASON: You will understand! As my song,

so are my words: the howling
of a wounded wolf...

ELECTRA: Ah, time marches on.
Behold the sun as it climbs.
We should hurry.

THE MASON (*takes her by the hand*):
Halt. You will understand.
Where did I stop?

ELECTRA: Woe is me that I do not know!

THE MASON: Ah, yes. I said: I do not sing like the other masons,
with a song following my swinging arms;
rather I howl, as I said, like a wolf,
and in me there is no happiness at returning.
Yes, a house in order, and the scent of olive oil rises,
and my bed is arranged
like a bier for a corpse.

ELECTRA: Aiiee, let me go. I'm in a hurry.

THE MASON: I said, like a bier! O,
cursed be the house and the bed wherein I take my rest!
What am I saying? Rest? I sleep
like a man in the grave,
since I deplete myself, during the day,
upon the scaffolding,
so that no strength remains in me,
so that no blood remains in me,
so that no juices remain in me,
so that not even in a dream do I blend myself into your blood!
May the punishment of the gods never befall me!

ELECTRA: Woe! Stop!

THE MASON: Then let the punishments of gods and men overtake
me.

Let me plunge from the high gantry right into the infernal
regions
amongst my sinful ancestors. Let them hurl me
into the dark abysses of the dead!

ELECTRA: Woe! Cease this! Hear what I'm
about to say to you.

THE MASON: I know what you will tell me!

You'll say to me: "What is wrong with you
now, my pitiful friend?

What misfortune has struck you now,
all at once on a day

when you've suffered me for years already,
without grumbling

but with pride at respecting the oath you gave
to the gods."

Yes, that's what you will say to me. And you will say:

"Our gratitude is with you!" And you'll say:

"Miserable friend, do you really want to
ignore those laws, both human and divine?"

That is what you will say.

You will remind me of my origins,

you'll remind me of *your* origins,

you'll remind me of chastisements and laws, remind me
of justice and honor, of *my* justice.

You'll remind me of vengeance and hell, remind
me of my dead brother...

ELECTRA: Hold your tongue! Hold it!

THE MASON: Hear this one thing more: I hate

the virtue with which I've been endowed,

the virtue they stuck in my hands

like a bar of iron, and I hate

the lowlife who first poisoned

my heart with the word virtue,

with talk of honor (mine) and humility.

I, so inconsequential and weak, why did I

have to become that fool whom integrity adorns?

Even back when, as a boy, I stood aside while my friends
engaged in heroic play

which demanded strength of body and arm and shoulders
sturdy,

to me, for the sake of solace or pity,

they assigned the role of judge,

and with it the burden of honor, which you

can see I bear still, and against my will.

O, cursed was that hour when they poured this plague into my heart, for news of me was heard far and wide and it travelled to your mother, her majesty the queen, and, behold, how fabulously she rewarded me. Giving me a virgin (and a handful of coins), the royal daughter, bound up with a vow. The royal daughter to the pathetic mason, who they say is virtuous through and through, a man honorable and poor, which for some means he's an idiot and for others, for you and your mother, a weakling and a wretch.

ELECTRA: Release me. Be on your way.

If you repent of your virtues that means you never had them. And I will go find safe harbor somewhere. Amongst the beggars or in a temple...And when my brother Orestes arrives, and the appointed hour strikes...

THE MASON: But how wise you are, and cautious!

You didn't say:
virtue will be rewarded! You menace rather, and you claim:
revenge will come, a bloody revenge, to reward
a moment of weakness, and to rinse away the
days of virtue, the nights of suffering. And you will say,
when the hour comes: here is your cur, slit his throat,
slaughter the wretched mason who confessed to me once
and uttered his words of blasphemy: that my maidenhood
was a burden to him, that he jades his body with labor and
drudgery,
the hades of sun and the hades of renunciation—that is
what you will say. And all of my straining and
sacrificing, my fasting and insomnia, the nightmares and the
penitence,
all of them will disappear,
as if they'd never existed, because one morning,
after setting out for work,
I dared to say to you, my wife by law,
my wife by damnation, that a home in which you await me

is joyless,
 and because I dared to tell you: my bed is not
 adytum but grave! Yes,
 you are, nevertheless, wise and cautious.
 You did not say: virtue receives recompense, for perhaps
 you'd a premonition of what I'm going to say to you now,
 or perhaps you've already heard from someone
 that I'm on fire when up on that scaffolding
 or even how they reward my virtue: they
 make bold to call me gelding
 and offer to trade aprons with me;
 she won't—they say—notice what little difference
 there is, since mason's bibs are all alike.
 But maybe she'll notice what's new
 under the apron!

ELECTRA (*draws a knife*):

Then you tell them
 that my Orestes is coming
 and he'll jerk off those aprons
 and everything that gets pulled with them.
 Say that to them. But now: farewell!

THE MASON: Stay! Oh, forgive my tantrum!

When the hour knocks, don't let it deny my agony and suffering
 or in the name of mania
 gainsay what I've done by means of words and thoughts.
 Forget all this. Go back to my house—and
 by making amends allow me to redeem the sin I've just
 committed. I am thus punished by pangs of conscience, by
 regret and fear,
 of vengeance from gods and men, but I know you'll
 be just and good. Forgive me.
 And when the time is full, oh, do not say:
 this fellow was evil, slit his throat.
 But say: the poor devil, unfortunate that he was,
 a stray sheep in a pack of wolves,
 a miserable mason caught in a cruel game
 with unflinching gods.

ELECTRA: Stand tall, pitiful man! Why so abject?

I forgive your madness,
 although it made you finger and fumble,
 even if in your head, with sacred things.
 Forgive you, I say, so do not
 fear for your miserable life.
 For your cowardly pelt. You'll be rewarded,
 I say, when Orestes comes. For I know
 how things stand for you,
 you who find yourself in this round of tyrants and tycoons,
 in this bloody feast of the divinities where
 even oppressors become victims!
 But remember: this knife
 that I'm holding at your throat will judge you
 in the name of gods and men if once more you should
 touch my innocence, even if merely by
 thoughts and words. Don't lose sight of it!
 Even if the mediocre ones have their touching reasons,
 that does not give you the right to demand, in this
 game of oppressors, as you put it—laws other than the ones
 that are, or to demand
 a role greater than that which the gods have accorded you—
 the role of a weakling
 and the noisome burden of impotence
 that you call honor. Farewell...
 And to them, I tell you, say: Orestes is coming,
 and he'll jerk off those aprons
 and everything that gets pulled with them.
 Speak thus to them!

THE MASON: Go up, hapless victim, onto the walls,
 up the scaffold close by the sun,
 let it slowly, drop by drop,
 shred and scorch you, let the winds and swelter
 wear you down the way a stone shrinks under the
 heavy mallets of stonemasons!
 O, damned be the moment when they first said:
 This, now this, is honorable! Cursed be the moment

their rasping voices unleashed the accursed
word “integrity” into my ear, and damn them
for being mediocre! Damn them for being tyrants!
And kings! Damn the laws! And gods!

(Exit.)

SECOND SCENE

Orestes, Pylades.

ORESTES: Pylades, my comrade!

You are the only one who still has not betrayed me,
You alone, my friend, encourage me with brisk words
and fan the coals of my vengeance.

Only you're telling me to avenge my dead father,
to do away with Aegisthus, interloper,
for he, along with my very own pestilential mother,
slew my father Agamemnon.

And there you have it, Pylades, friend to me in
my misfortune: guided by the Providence of
desire for revenge,

accompanied by darkness as my scout,
I have now reached the district of my birth, Argos.
This night, cloaked in shadows,
I went to the grave of my father
to weep my fill in grief
but let the avenging demon grow stronger still,
steeled by tears

to the strength of a sword three times tempered;
then I lopped off a lock of my hair
and atop his tomb I slaughtered a sacrificial lamb.
I let a jet of blood fly.

O, thus will gush—may the gods forgive me—
the stream from Aegisthus' throat
and out of my mother's heart,
two fountains of blood
with thick warm spray where I'll wash my hands.

(Pause. Voices from the marketplace.)

Oh, Pylades, my brother, how I would love to see my sister
Electra!

Alas, this desire I hold is not pure,
for my sister I do not regard
as a sister but a fellow conspirator,
an avenger,
helpful to me by dint of her feminine wiles
in the slaying I intend.

I heard, Pylades, and it knocks my heart apart
that they slammed the yoke of marriage down on her,
shoving her into the bed of a poor mason
who then owned her virginity...

Halt!

Over there. I spot a woman venturing early onto the square.
I'll ask her in a roundabout way about Electra.

Maybe she'll be able to tell us something.

(They withdraw.)

THIRD SCENE

Electra.

ELECTRA: Woe is me!

Woe is me, reddening dawn,
woe is me, whitening day,
woe is me, mighty Zeus!

(Pause. From the ramparts of the city comes the call of trumpets: changing of the guard.)

In what city, in which house,
in what company, on which square
my disconsolate brother,
must you now be begging,
for you to abandon your sister
amidst insuperable sorrows
under a vengeful sun
that stings my heart like a knife.

Woe is me!

Alas, Zeus, o mighty god,
 alas, brother, o manly arm,
 wend your way towards Argos
 to avenge my father!

Alas, father!

Instead of avenging blood,
 here is blood from my neck.

Take this shorn hair.

Here is my lament.

Alas, ye gods!

Take my white neck,
 white, like a swan's,
 take my white throat
 that mourns like a swan bereft,
 hopelessly adrift upon a lake;
 snared in a trap or a net
 it calls helplessly for its father.

Alas, father!

It is thus with me, the afflicted daughter,
 and I call for you in vain,
 oh, my gods!

(Pause)

Your wife, poor father,
 drew the final bath for you,
 with her white arm, gilded,
 her feminine hand, perfumed,
 her tender fingers, decorated with rings—

(Pause)

Then she struck you with the ax between your ears
 like a beast,
 with those pampered and scented hands of hers,
 arms white and bloody;
 woe is me!

(Pause)

Afterwards hurrying—
 not managing to rinse her hands—

ELECTRA

into the embrace of that cur,
her paramour
named Aegisthus.
Woe be unto us!

FOURTH SCENE

Electra. Orestes. Pylades.

ORESTES (*crosses into Electra's path*):

Halt!

ELECTRA: Alas!

ORESTES: Be not afraid.

ELECTRA: Why are you blocking my way?

ORESTES: Halt. Listen. Do not scream. They are lying in wait for me, too.

ELECTRA: Look. Here I stand. I am in your power. For you are stronger even if you have no weapon.

ORESTES: I come bearing news from your brother.

ELECTRA: O, gods!

Let us move over there, to the side.

I'm listening. Say it: is he alive?

ORESTES: He lives. That is the happiest of the news I deliver.

ELECTRA: O, may the gods be praised!

Where is he? Where is he bound?

ORESTES: He's in a safe place.

ELECTRA: Isn't this son of Agamemnon likely to go hungry for his daily bread?

ORESTES: He does not crave bread.

But he is an outcast.

ELECTRA: What kind of tidings do you bring me, then?

ORESTES: The selfsame worries afflicting you torment him now too:

whether you are alive

and what kind of life you might lead.

ELECTRA: Look at me. It will be obvious to you.

ORESTES: Your skin has grown swarthy
and voice hoarse from malediction.

ELECTRA: My hair I trimmed with a knife,
as the vagrants do.

ORESTES: For the sake of your dead father,
or for your brother?

ELECTRA: I weep for one who is dead,
and another who lives.

ORESTES: You mean you still love him the same?
After all these years?

ELECTRA: Like the very eyes in my head.

ORESTES: And what is the reason
you reside beyond the walls?

ELECTRA: They married me off
to a man with a house outside the city.

ORESTES: Such news he will not willingly hear.

ELECTRA: Nevertheless: you must tell him all!

ORESTES: Speak, then.

ELECTRA: He is poor. A wretched man.
Well-nigh holy.

ORESTES: Holy?
You mean he threw up a temple or two?

ELECTRA: Oh yes, holy.
For he does not molest me.

ORESTES: Harbors he contempt for you?

ELECTRA: He respects my origins.
And the specter of Agamemnon, my father.

ORESTES: Then for him marriage was not
pleasure, but hell.

ELECTRA: And not just his marriage. His life, too,
is a torment
and an inferno.

ORESTES: I know it.
He fears Orestes' vengeance.

ELECTRA: That I do not know. Maybe.

ORESTES: He should be rewarded
for such uprightness.

ELECTRA: My brother Orestes
will pay him back
according to his merit.

ORESTES: But why bundle you off to him?
Didn't your mother—

ELECTRA: Mention not that name to me!

ORESTES: And Aegisthus?

ELECTRA: Hark, o stranger, and I shall tell it:
they gave me to him
so I'd bring forth feeble sons
and my line fall to extinction.

ORESTES: So that you'd not bring
into the world a son to avenge you?

ELECTRA: That's how they thought of it.
May the plague take them all!

ORESTES: So then they've no idea
you're still a virgin?

ELECTRA: I conceal it. Like a holy mystery.

ORESTES: And if this brother
of yours returns,
what is it that he can do?

ELECTRA: You are serious? For shame!
Everyone knows what he'll do.

ORESTES: How will he be able to do in
your father's murderers
when one of them is the mother
who bore you?

ELECTRA: The same way she
murdered her husband:
with an ax!

ORESTES: And would you help him?

ELECTRA: I tell you: we'll use the same ax.

ORESTES: Shall I make this known to him?

ELECTRA: Say it.

Not as a firm promise
but as an oath.

ORESTES: Oh, if your brother could hear you!

Could he but witness your hate!

ELECTRA: Alas, stranger!

I wouldn't even recognize him.

ORESTES: No wonder. You parted as children.

ELECTRA: From among the people I trust
there's only one
would know him again.

ORESTES: I know it. That stranger who,
as it's said,
popped him out of death's clutches.

ELECTRA: Yes, him. Strophius the Phocian,
who once was the teacher
of my father himself.

ORESTES: Has your deceased father
found peace and a proper grave?

ELECTRA: He has!

They threw him in a hole like a dog
so the dogs wouldn't drag him 'round.

ORESTES: That's the way it was?

Tell me everything. And take heart.

ELECTRA: Entice the words out of me, foreigner,
and I'll tell all in due course,
but I ask you, and beg of you,
transmit to my poor brother
the misery you see on me
and in my fate
and our father's horrific end.
Tell him in what poverty you found me,
wearing such rags as these,
my hair sprinkled with ashes
and in this kind of rough home.
Tell him everything.
That I wove my own pitiful dresses
with my own hand (trouble being the best teacher in all)
for otherwise, oh, for shame, I'd walk about
naked as a slave.
Barefoot I go

across chisel-hard rock,
 and my feet have no memory more
 of sandals and pliant strappings of gold.
 Tell him everything:
 how she who bore us
 sits today on the Phrygian throne,
 not as a slave
 but as queen!
 And demure Asian slave girls
 brought by father as trophies from war
 minister to her cursed body:
 they drench her in heavy perfumes
 anoint her with fragrant oils
 (so she'll pleasure her lover
 ever ever more)
 in that very bath
 where she met her husband with the fatal ax.
 Tell him everything.

(Pause.)

And as for the one who aided her in murder,
 this Aegisthus,
 already he's climbed into our dead father's chariot,
 gripping the gold-plated scepter
 in a hand sticky with blood.
 Tell it all to him:
 that the grave of our glorious father
 now lies neglected,
 without laurel or spruce,
 with no headstone or decoration.
 Tell him everything.
 But the illustrious husband of our mother,
 when he is in his cups,
 stomps on the naked grave
 (so it is rumored in the town)
 and hurls stones at the barren mound
 jeering at our late father.
 "O Agamemnon, where's your son Orestes,

ELECTRA

who's to defend your grave with the strength
of a hero's arm?"

Yes, tell him that, too.

Although these words will pierce his heart.

(The mason enters.)

SCENE FIVE

The same characters again. Plus the mason.

THE MASON: To good luck
or misfortune
shall I attribute this arrival?
Do you seek, stranger,
for a mason or a builder?
—For I am he.

ELECTRA: They are heralds, come to me and
at an opportune time: they bring news from my brother,
Orestes.

THE MASON: From Orestes?

ELECTRA: He sent them to bear witness to my travail.

THE MASON: Travail is easy to see. But I'm
guessing you did not say...
how much of it there is?

ELECTRA: I did.
I elaborated upon all my misery,
all the misfortune,
and he'll take it hard.

I want that.
I want my misery to hasten in him
the ripening of a terrible decision.

THE MASON: So they know the extent of your sorrows,
and are familiar with your troubles,
and also your secret.

ELECTRA: They know what they need to know.
Worry not.

ORESTES: This is your husband?

ELECTRA: Yes.

ORESTES: He seems honorable.

ELECTRA: Tell Orestes
 he need not be concerned
 for my honor or his.

(Shows her knife.)

 But my husband, they say, is a noble man.

ORESTES: Noble?

 I believe you. But do you know
 what powers, what forces slumber in
 people? Overnight noble becomes homicidal and
 swinish. In people's emotions
 such startling turns sometimes occur
 and the person sees even himself no more:
 a wild dream, some mad desire,
 and of honor remains not a trace or echo.
 For the burden of righteousness is harder to
 support than wickedness. As for blood lines,
 they are *karst*-lost rivers:¹
 I've seen the most base son
 of an honorable man, seen good-for-nothings
 have noble-minded children,
 seen hunger and avarice
 in the souls of the rich,
 and in poor bodies
 a golden heart and disposition.
 So, how are we to judge character?
 Behold: that man who calls himself your husband
 is not famous,
 his house is of no renown
 nor does any wealth grace his life,
 but I see that he has more integrity than many.

(To the audience.)

 O, you dullards, you windbags,
 you stuffed shirts,

¹ The word Kiš uses here is *ponornica*, denoting a river which disappears underground.

do you plan on forever judging people
by their money and position?
Our amphitheaters and courts are full already of
quite enough stuffed shirts.
Those who live in magnificence
and strut about—
they are but heaps of meat
with no heart or reason,
who clog up the marketplaces
and take up seats.
Well, let us go into the house. Let's have faith
in the sincerity of this welcome.

THE MASON: Honorable stranger,
I no longer feel my poverty;
your words have made me wealthy.
For this, my thanks.

(They enter the house.)

ELECTRA *(to the mason, in private)*:

Dignified guests we have taken into our home,
and now we must give them a fitting reception.
Hasten, therefore, my friend, and produce old Strophius for
them,
the third of the outcasts of the house of Agamemnon.
Tell him to come to us,
and bring for the guests fruits of the harvests,
and tender lamb, a bit of cheese,
and good wine in a skin.
He will be as happy as you when he hears
that the boy he freed
is alive.

THE MASON: Off I go quickly
to make his day. But do not say to them:
he's a lousy one—cut him down! Don't tell them:
he had—

ELECTRA: Make haste, I say. This joyous news is reward
for us both. Your patience—it held out to the end.
Your revolt amounted only to a sound presentiment

and a positive sign.
Therefore let us forget it.
Go.

(He leaves. Electra rushes into the house behind her guests.)

SCENE SIX

Strophius, followed by Electra.

STROPHIUS: Where's my little girl,
my honorable young lady,
the daughter of my late lord?
I dragged my old bones over here, you see,
to have a look at her,
and hear the good news she's come by.

(Electra comes out.)

ELECTRA: Greetings, honorable old man!

STROPHIUS: Greetings, daughter!

My happiness is too great to tell at finding you home.
I received the message from your husband,
and now, look what darkens your door—
my old body, no longer even worthy of the name.
I bring you, as you see, and as I was instructed,
cheese and fruit, and tender lamb
for fine guests, indeed—
so you can host them
in a stately way.
And I'm bringing—here you go—wine in this skin,
an old wine with aroma divine
evoking the souls of its grapes, sunny southern slopes in
autumn,
and the sun that heated them so long ago
and collected the spirits of their very plants.
This old wine is the fluid of memories,
which is why it
so refreshes heart and soul.
Take it to your guests as quickly as you can.

ELECTRA: But why are you crying, old man?

Did you plumb the soul of that wine
a bit on your way? This liquid medium
of memories?

Or does my grief move you when you see
it has grown, along with me?

Or are you crying for my brother,
the exiled Orestes? Or you're recalling
my father, whom bitter fate overtook?
Or is it all of this at once, making you feel
it the more?

STROPHIUS: 'Tis easy for children and old men to burst into tears,
for no reason at all.

Even though the prospect of age suffices to bring on sobs. But
for now I'm

crying for your father. For Agamemnon:
his grave I visited on my way here,
for I couldn't master the longing to see it.

At his grave I encountered no one,
and so began to weep like a child,
for your father and for myself.

(Were such a fate to befall HIM,
the tyrant, then what in the world must
be awaiting me—in this world and the next?)

So I unlaced this skin
and poured wine of sacrifice on the barren mound,
picked up a clod of earth,
soaked in sacrificial wine:

astounded,
I descried on it traces of black blood,
still right fresh!

After that I found this curl—a lock
of blonde hair.

Who, daughter, who could've dripped sacrificial blood on the
grave?

Who lopped off a blond curl of hair?

Has your brother not come

ELECTRA

to visit in secret his father's grave?

ELECTRA: May the gods incline to your words, and redeem your doubts.

The foreigners who've turned up as guests
are saying that he lives.

STROPHIUS: Bring me as soon as you can
before those who've seen Orestes of late.

So I can pepper them with questions.

I'll put them to the test.

ELECTRA: And here they are, coming out.

SCENE SEVEN

The same as the last, plus Orestes and Pylades. Chorus.

STROPHIUS: Accept my greetings, esteemed strangers.

ORESTES: Hail, old man!

(To Electra.)

Who's this invalid, Electra?

ELECTRA: Agamemnon's teacher.

ORESTES: What are you saying?

The man who plucked
your brother from misfortune
at that grave hour?

ELECTRA: That's the one.

ORESTES: Why is he looking at me like that?

ELECTRA: He's old, and suspicious.

ORESTES: Old man, is this—

STROPHIUS: *(As if he had not heard Orestes. To Electra.)*

Pray, daughter, to the gods.

ELECTRA: *(Raising her hands.)*

Eternal glory to them!

STROPHIUS: That's it

And now behold the stranger.

ELECTRA: Either you've poured some of that sacrificial wine
onto the hard clump of your soul, old man,
or you've lost your mind.

STROPHIUS: Old or mad—it's all the same to you.

But...

(Continuing to study Orestes.)

ELECTRA: But?

STROPHIUS: Experience has no dotage.

ELECTRA: What are you driving at?

STROPHIUS: *(Points his finger at Orestes.)*

That is your brother! Orestes!

ELECTRA: O Apollo! What's he saying?

STROPHIUS: I said it straight out: Orestes!

ELECTRA: *(Flies to Orestes, then stops precipitously.)*

How can I believe you?

STROPHIUS: Do you see that scar, hard by his right eyebrow?

ELECTRA: I see it.

STROPHIUS: Fly, then, to your brother's arms.

Embrace him as you once did,
on the occasion he was given that scar
chasing, with you, after that skittish fawn
so many years ago, in that courtyard,
the garden of your distant childhood.

ELECTRA: *(Hugs Orestes.)*

Orestes! Brother!

ORESTES: My sister!

ELECTRA: And you come in disguise to your sole sister?

ORESTES: Exile has made me cautious.

But I see—

ELECTRA: It's not just that I am your sister

but what's more *(Carefully.)*

I'm a conspirator

tied to you by a double bond:

we are of the same blood

and that same blood we must spill!

ORESTES: May the gods hearken to you

(if we need to believe they're there)!

ELECTRA: Do not blaspheme!

ORESTES: The sin here is if there is no punishment,
if we are betrayed,

if injustice carries the field,
if justice does not emerge triumphant—
I renounce the gods and life!

ELECTRA: It is up to us to carry out their will.

CHORUS: Raise your hands to the heavens,
and pray to the gods!

(Pause.)

Embrace, lovers,
ravage your bodies,
squeeze, twist till your limbs break,
gorge yourselves on each other's throat.
Ravish each other in the bed-chamber,
in the bed-chamber and in the grave.

(Pause.)

See how the day has dawned.

Look at the hand of justice on its way!

ORESTES: And now you all must tell me

(Cautiously.) how I'm to avenge my father.

Is there in all of Argos any person, besides you,
who is devoted to me?

With whom, apart from my sister, a helpless woman,
shall I resort to this bloody feast?

Where do I begin, o gods?

How to gain admittance to the court
while bearing the sword of vengeance?

Is night my ally,
or would it be day?

Tell me, old man.

STROPHIUS: In your affliction, son, you have no friend.

Rely therefore on the star of your good fortune,
and believe in the gods.

ORESTES: What is to be done?

ELECTRA: Hate!

ORESTES: Do I go into the city? Like this?

STROPHIUS: That isn't wise. You'd achieve nothing.

ORESTES: I know. But how to go about it?

STROPHIUS: Avoid the guards.

Aegisthus is terrified, and his guards are vigilant.
 ORESTES: The terror that I've instilled in him—
 it is part of the revenge.
 But his sleeplessness is not the hand of justice,
 only its shadow.
 Still, how am I to go about it?
 STROPHIUS: Well, hear me out. Something has occurred to me.
 ORESTES: Speak!
 STROPHIUS: You need not enter the city to get to Aegisthus.
 On my way here I accidentally crossed paths with him.
 ORESTES: Where? Speak!
 STROPHIUS: Here in the vicinity. In a field.
 ORESTES: What was he doing in the field?
 STROPHIUS: He was preparing a sacrifice for the gods.
 ORESTES: To atone for his sins?
 STROPHIUS: So it will end, for the guards will hearken to you.
 ORESTES: How large a retinue accompanies him?
 STROPHIUS: He only had servants with him. But they were armed.
 ORESTES: Will anyone recognize me?
 STROPHIUS: His servants have never set eyes on you.
 ORESTES: If I overpower Aegisthus, how do I win over the others?
 STROPHIUS: It's in the character of a slave's soul
 to hail the victor. Whoever that is.
 ORESTES: How do I steal close to him?
 STROPHIUS: Pass before him as if by accident.
 ORESTES: Do you think he'll summon me?
 STROPHIUS: Yes. Point of honor.
 ORESTES: He'll be honored, all right.
 STROPHIUS: You yourself will know how to proceed from that
 point.
 ORESTES: But where is she? Isn't she with him?
 STROPHIUS: Your mother?
 ORESTES: Yes.
 STROPHIUS: She was not with him.
 ORESTES: Why did she not attend her husband in the field?
 The sacrifice he tenders the gods
 would benefit her soul as well...

That's my impression.

STROPHIUS: Among the population she's despised, so she
does not like to appear beside Aegisthus. The
public hates the wives of tyrants
more than the tyrants themselves.

ORESTES: And how do I do her the honor, too,
upon my arrival?

ELECTRA: I'll do her in.

ORESTES: You? How?

ELECTRA: With an ax!

Strophius will assist me in the deed.

Thus go, old man,

and call to Clytemnestra:

Electra is in confinement. She's given birth to a child.

A boy.

STROPHIUS: You think that will kill her?

ELECTRA: It is not easy to kill a snake,

I know that myself.

You have to hit its head.

STROPHIUS: So what do I say exactly?

When was the child born?

ELECTRA: He's ten days old. Tell her that.

Big and healthy—Agamemnon's progeny.

STROPHIUS: You think all that will harrow her?

ELECTRA: Of course!

She'll shed tears and show up with gifts:

poison, or an ax. She is skilled in this.

STROPHIUS: You're going to lure her into your home?

ELECTRA: That's it exactly.

STROPHIUS: And then?

ELECTRA: I'll dispatch her direct to hell!

(To Orestes.)

But now it's your turn. Go.

ORESTES: Old man, show me the way.

STROPHIUS: Let's get to it. Let the gods stand by us!

ORESTES: Zeus! God of my fathers!

ELECTRA: O, Hero!

ORESTES: Favor us with victory!

ELECTRA: Have mercy on our offspring!

ORESTES: O, lifeless father!

ELECTRA: O, Gaia, mistress of earth, I turn my appeal to you!

ORESTES: Protect your children!

CHORUS: See how into bloody color

each of the four horses leaps,

in a cloud of dust,

in the shade of a dense forest,

a dense forest of spears.

Kill the leader of this troop,

o daughter of Tyndareus,

of such horsemen kill the leader;

kill the husband, o wicked woman.

(Pause.)

But somewhere they're sharpening the swords,

that will chew through your soft throat.

But somewhere they're building a coffin

that's fit to enfold your frame.

Make haste, o daughter of Tyndareus,

to embrace while you live. You malevolent wife.

(Death arrives on horseback,

as riders four,

as lancers four.)

(As an echo.)

Somewhere swords are being whetted already,

to chew through your soft throat.

You can hear the distant hammering:

that's your coffin being knocked together,

being fitted to enfold your frame.

ELECTRA: Now be off!

If you die—I'll die with you.

A double-edged knife I've laid by for myself.

But if the reports of you

I hear are good,

my home will be flooded with with cries of joy.

Now I go to arrange everything.

ELECTRA

For good news
or as my own funeral.
ORESTES: Let's get to it, old man!
(*Orestes exits with Strophius and Pylades,
while Electra goes into the house.*)

SCENE EIGHT

A field near Argos. Aegisthus with his retinue. Then Orestes and Pylades.

AEGISTHUS: (*With his hands upraised.*)
...And let it be thus!
Now set to, servants,
and bring me the sacrificial lamb.
(*And one of the servants goes off. Aegisthus catches sight of
Orestes and Pylades.*)
Hello, strangers!
(*Orestes and Pylades keep their eyes on the city, pretending not to
have heard him.*)
Hey! Strangers, I said hello!

ORESTES: You were talking to us, lord?

AEGISTHUS: To you. Whom else, then?

ORESTES: Maybe you're talking with the gods?

AEGISTHUS: But then what I said was: hello, stranger!

I intended that for you.

ORESTES: Well, greetings, lord.

AEGISTHUS: Who are you?

ORESTES: Thessalonians.

AEGISTHUS: Where are you headed?

ORESTES: To Olympus, to take Zeus an offering.

AEGISTHUS: Well then, be my guests.

I'm also preparing a sacrifice to the gods.
(*To the servants.*)

Give the strangers water
that they may wash their hands.

ORESTES: Our hands are clean, lord.

We washed them just now

in crystal water from the stream.
 Still we gladly accept your invitation.
 But tell us—may we, as strangers,
 offer up to god sacrifices with you?

AEGISTHUS: Well, where are your sacrificial offerings?

Where is the calf or your lamb?

ORESTES: O lord, our gifts are rather modest.

We bring the gods not so much meat as prayers.

AEGISTHUS: More to their liking is the scent of scorched hair and
 smoking blood,
 compared to any prayers or the offering up of commonplace
 fruits.

But even that's better than nought.

ORESTES: Sometimes salt or flour, or a bough of laurel,
 possesses upon the altar the power of fresh blood.

AEGISTHUS: If you hold so, strangers, then worship according to
 your lights.

In any case I shall bring to them
 the sacrifice of blood.

But first I shall pour over the altar flour and salt,
 and burn a bough of laurel—before the blood gushes.
(Shakes out the flour and salt, prostrates himself.)

ORESTES: This will suffice for me.

(Places a branch of laurel on the altar.)

AEGISTHUS: O, mountain nymphs, and ye gods!

Grant that Clytemnestra and I may offer up the blood of sac-
 rifice frequently to you, without fear of our enemies,
 And as for them, our enemies, grant that they shall become
 butchered offerings
 upon our altar.

(Continues mouthing a prayer to himself.)

ORESTES: O, mountain nymphs, and ye gods!

Grant that this prayer of mine may
 have the force of sacrificial blood,
 that my words may leap towards the heavens
 like a jet of blood.

And that my foes may be butchered offerings upon my altar.

AEGISTHUS: (*Bares his knife. The servants bring him bowls and a lamb which he begins to slaughter.*)

Stranger, you're from Thessaly, you said?

ORESTES: Yes, lord.

AEGISTHUS: The reputation dogs you Thessalonians that you are more adept than the rest in skinning lambs and bulls, and breaking horses, too. So take this knife, stranger, and show us that this good name does not stick to you in vain.

(*The servant hands him a knife. With Pylades' help, Orestes butchers the lamb and immediately sets about flaying and gutting it.*)

ORESTES: Here are the intestines, my lord.

AEGISTHUS: You are a true Thessalonian, do doubt!

And now to see what is written for us in them.

(*Aegisthus bends over the intestines. Orestes stabs him in the spine with a knife. While Aegisthus wheezes in his death rattle, the confused servants grab their discarded spears. Orestes and Pylades, pressing their backs to each other, hold out their arms with knives drawn.*)

ORESTES: Stop, you servants! I am Orestes. The son of Agamemnon.

AN OLD SERVANT: Drop the spears!

I do recognize him.

It's Orestes, Agamemnon's son.

It was right for him to do in this despot.

ORESTES: I have come according to the will of the gods to avenge my father.

Be kind to us and to you

we'll requite it in equal measure.

We are the new masters.

AN OLD SERVANT: Viva Orestes, our lord!

(*The servants withdraw into the background, thunderstruck. We subsequently watch, mutely, as Orestes and Pylades drag Aegisthus' corpse in deathly silence. No words are spoken. All that can be heard is the animalistic breathing of the two men.*)

ELECTRA

TENTH SCENE

In front of Electra's home.

Electra, then Orestes, Pylades, servants, chorus.

(Electra worriedly awaits the messenger. Suddenly triumphal music breaks out, and one hears the thudding of footsteps and the howls of excited men. Then Orestes and Pylades arrive, with laurel wreaths crammed onto their heads, dragging Aegisthus's corpse.)

ELECTRA: Now I can see all the way to heaven...

ORESTES: *(Fending off Electra's praise with his raised hand.)*

Don't talk, sister! Instead lift your hands up to the heavens that you may praise the gods.

For what is the point of words of praise?

For have I done away with our father's assassin with words, or by the strength of my right arm?

See here how I tug this dead man around like a dead dog, like an empty skin stinking of wine. Vent your rage at him!

Take your revenge for all the torments this miscreant visited upon you.

Throw him to the wild beasts for them to make ribbons of his flesh and split open his bones to the marrow, the very storehouse of his vileness.

Or just hurl him before the swine so that they unreel his intestines across the muck, mixing his meat in the flesh of the boars.

Or ram him down on a giant pole and let the birds peck him from a running start, aiming their beaks in the center of his eyes.

Behold, your erstwhile tyrant is now your slave.

ELECTRA: My hatred is too great.

It leaves me afraid.

ORESTES: Afraid? Of what?

ELECTRA: If he's alive, then I'll do what you say, one measure after the other. But such things as these—

ORESTES: No one in the world
 who knows your pain
 Will be able to find fault with you.

ELECTRA: I know. Nonetheless...

ORESTES: As you like it! But I am afraid
 that if I deprive your eyes of him for hating,
 you'll repent
 that no one had read aloud the litany
 for the repose of his soul.

ELECTRA: You are right.

But where do I even begin cursing him?
(Approaches Aegisthus' corpse, resolutely, inspired.)
 Where should I start with shaming you? Where should I start
 cursing you,
 where do I begin spitting on you? How to pick at you, like a
 bird does,
 but with words, and bite at you with hatred, as a worm,
 before I commence grinding you up?
 And how shall I complete the malediction?
 What do I place
 into the middle, and how will I collect in a heap
 all the wailing and cursing
 to which I gave vent aloud at break of day
 year after year
 and which I addressed to myself
 in secret—
 so that I shudder with horror
 at my very own words!
 Where do all the words now bide
 that for years I wanted to spit into your face
 like a swarm of wasps?
 Where are all the messages today for me
 to slosh into that face of yours
 like a bucket of slops?
 But watch this:
 I'll tell you all this dead
 since I wasn't able to alive.

O, murderer!

This is for all the feasting carried out
in the palace of my father,
with you hiding behind my mother's skirts!

Here's for reigning on the strength
of Agamemnon's glory!

You thought to become lord and ruler;
instead you grew famous far and wide
as a henpecked husband,
a jealous bore.

You turned into the footstool of a woman
who roped you into crime.

You seducer, you thought you'd win
a woman disloyal to her husband.

What a marvelous team you made in crime!

But here too

she outsmarted you,

and cast a pall over your fame,

even though no one could attribute this loathsome crime to
you,

only to her, and rightfully so.

For you could never have grown in renown,
even by crime!

Your name does not exist,

and it never ever did.

To be sure, the Argives all recognize you
and call you the husband of that woman,
but no one has ever bothered to say of her:
wife of that man!

And your children haven't a name either,
nor will they ever,

you loser: people will know them solely by their mother—
if, that is, these curses of mine do not
make you a household name;
for my imprecations are ugly enough
to be heard beyond a doubt
far far beyond our city.

ORESTES: Enough!

(*To the servants.*)

Carry him away!

ELECTRA: Just one word more.

ORESTES: Go on then. Tell him.

ELECTRA: (*Spits on the corpse.*)

Go to hell!

ORESTES: (*To the servants.*)

Conceal the body somewhere,
so my mother does not see him—
before she is cut down.

ELECTRA: Make haste! Set to, and make haste!

(*Servants appear and remove Aegisthus' corpse.*)

ORESTES: What's that? Who goes there?

ELECTRA: A finely dressed lady.

Our mother!

ORESTES: Oh, so soon?

ELECTRA: Perfect timing.

ORESTES: Time for the sheep to go to the slaughter.

ELECTRA: Look!

Her chariot's decked out as if for a wedding.
She puffs and struts like a peacock.

ORESTES: What shall we do with her?

ELECTRA: Does the radiance of her
give you pause?

ORESTES: Not radiance, but dread, and horror!

Killing one's mother—o gods.

ELECTRA: (*Mocking him.*)

Killing one's husband—o gods.

ORESTES: The gods are toying with us.

ELECTRA: Their wisdom is impenetrable to us.

ORESTES: To kill one's mother—there's wisdom in that?

ELECTRA: To avenge one's father—is that not the law
both divine and human?

ORESTES: I know.

Blood for blood. An eye for an eye.
Tooth for tooth.

A head for a head. One grave for another.
 And around like that in a circle.
 Me today, you tomorrow.
 Swords, tears. Such wonderful laws,
 for people and divinities.

STROPHIUS: O, gods! Is there some hold-up here?
 Some feeble woman's elaborating
 on what you must undertake? Just recall
 all the calamities that you lived through.
 Have you forgotten all the maledictions
 and damnations you uttered in the years
 in isolation, your hand resting on the handle
 of your knife?
 Set your jaw once more,
 call to mind how you gnashed your teeth,
 the way your temples ached
 and throbbed from your teeth clenched in hate!

ELECTRA: You will be damned
 if you do not avenge your father!

ORESTES: Damned?

ELECTRA: You'll curse yourself in the nights
 in isolation. it will be the most
 ominous of all damnations.
 Whatever form these laws take, the
 human ones and the gods—they are one!
 Woe to the person who flags
 in faith to them!

ORESTES: But am I to cut down my own mother?
 Will I then not be cursing myself
 at night in that isolation?

ELECTRA: O, would you forget all the wrongs
 visited upon you by this woman
 you call mother?
 Bitches and she-wolves,
 cats and wild insensate beasts—
 they all take care to
 guard their offspring

and know to transport them gently
in their jaws,
like their only wealth in this world! And
she whom you call a mother? What did she do?

ORESTES: O, gods.

But I do remember when
she was a mother to me! I recall her
caresses and I remember when she
bore me in her arms
like a cat with young in her teeth,
I call to mind the
shrieks of glee when I was still an infant
and she came into me in the mornings
and her joy when I'd
babble some puerile nugget of wisdom;
I recall her pride—

ELECTRA: Her pride?

ORESTES: Her pride when she'd lead me by the hand
out to greet the guests,
and the way her hand would stroke the hair on my head...

STROPHIUS: With that self-same hand, you poor devil—

ORESTES: I know. Oh, I know it! With that same hand
she slayed my father,
in that same hand she clenched the ax as she
hunted for me all across our palace,
hoping to slay me too. O, I know all this!
But wasn't that a moment of madness?
The same madness that grips us now?
Thirst for the same vengeance
choking you and me this day?
That same bitter taste in the mouth?
The same trembling in the body and
eclipse in the soul? The same craving
to be shed of the labors of revenge
at the earliest possible moment,
to snap as soon as we can
the bloody cord of fate binding us

to the laws and the gods and
to our damnation?
Wasn't it the voice of the same law
that also vexes us?
Simply because of one turn of insanity...

ELECTRA: Her I will not forgive!

She has cost us too much.

STROPHIUS: Have you already forgotten those hissing curses
that you hurled out
this morning at the grave of your dead father?
Haven't you promised him a fitting revenge?
And do I really have to remind you again
that you were an innocent little child
when I rescued you from the knife
of this woman you call mother,
for she was prepared to put you up
onto the altar of her shameless lust
like a sacrificial lamb?

ELECTRA: Do not dither! The hour is late.

And hark—I hear the peacock coming;
she's taking her strut
among her servants.
Take cover!

ORESTES: Horror crawls my frame.

*(Orestes and Strophius go hide in the house.
Clytemnestra comes out with her attendants.)*

CHOIR: Hail, o queen,
daughter of Tyndareus.
Greetings, lady, adorned with gold.
I bow down to you as far as the black earth.
Do you hear, my lady—to the black earth!

ELECTRA

SCENE TEN

Electra, Clytemnestra, Choir.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Greetings, daughter!

Your confinement's already lifted?

ELECTRA: Greetings, madam.

(She attempts to hold onto her as Clytemnestra walks down the stairs. Clytemnestra tears her hand away.)

O, am I not allowed even to touch
my mother's hand?

CLYTEMNESTRA: Forget it.

I'll call a servant.

ELECTRA: A servant?

What am I then?—No, I'm not
a servant. I'm a slave.

And have you to thank for it!

CLYTEMNESTRA: And what am I?

ELECTRA: *(Bows.)*

The holy queen!

CLYTEMNESTRA: That is but an illusion.

I'm also a slave.

ELECTRA: Whatever are you saying?

CLYTEMNESTRA: Yes, a slave like you!

Like all of us are:
a plaything of fate.

ELECTRA: That's what we all are?

CLYTEMNESTRA: You won't grant me
that's what I am?

ELECTRA: No!

For you yourself tailored your fate to measure.
With an ax.

CLYTEMNESTRA: By myself, you mean?

ELECTRA: Not at all.

I forgot. Not alone:
with Aegisthus.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Ah, so that's it. That's what you're aiming at.
Well, listen:

I am not mad and I'm not a murderess,
 no more so than you.
 Do you really believe I struck with the ax
 just like that, for
 the sake of wantonness, or madness?
 I shall speak on, for I know
 that such a reputation dogs me:
 I cut down my husband out of wantonness,
 and for my lover!
 And all of you, just not me,
 that is your father, and you, and Orestes your brother,
 you are all righteous,
 and from you pours the voice of vengeance,
 sanctified revenge!
 You are moved by divine laws,
 you act according to the rules of heaven,
 while I, Clytemnestra, your mother, a wreck of a woman,
 I must be acting in my own interests,
 beyond society and beyond the law,
 according to my own wicked tastes.
 All right, well—listen! It is not thus.
 If you're inclined to hatred,
 then hate me,
 but at least get your mind around this:
 I am also a woman.

ELECTRA: You're the queen!

CLYTEMNESTRA: I was speaking of a woman,
 a miserable one, slave to the laws,
 both human and heavenly,
 just like you,
 with a human heart, weak,
 just like yours,
 with a soul that was weak, too, and
 bent on revenge,
 as are you,
 with the body of a woman,
 greedy and brittle,

just like you,
 desiring peace and tranquility,
 desiring a husband her home,
 just like you,
 desirous of a protective arm—as are you,
 desirous of children and progeny—as you are...!

ELECTRA: Pitiful, odious woman!

CLYTEMNESTRA: Say: unhappy woman! Say:
 forlorn mother...

ELECTRA: Wretch!

CLYTEMNESTRA: Yes: a wretch—like you!

(Pause.)

My father married me off to yours
 and I became a happy woman, and a fortunate mother,
 and then the glory of my husband became my misfortune,
 while that glory became his fate.
 Following advice from some idiot,
 a prophet
 who supposedly could read the thoughts of god,
 he sacrificed to the gods my daughter most dear,
 your sister, Iphigenia,
 so that Artemis would grant him favorable winds
 for his ships, to his glory:
 the fame of the illustrious victor at Troy!
 Maybe all this you've forgotten?
 And you still claim I'm the queen,
 temperamental woman, a whore and a monster?
 Do you still believe the ax fell that way
 from wantonness,
 and the cravings of love?
 Did you truly think I turned out thus,
 turned into a freak, as you'd say,
 straight out of some splendid tranquility,
 in times long past?
 Do you think that my heart,
 the heart of a mother and a woman,
 had always been dead?

(*Pause.*)

O, gods, how I cried,
 how my soul tore in half
 when they led my daughter away
 so they could put a girl on the altar
 as if she were the white lamb of sacrifice!
 O, and it was easy for him to do.
 He also didn't cut down his daughter from wantonness,
 because he was directed by the laws of men:
 he offered her up so he'd by
 her death save other men from theirs;
 well then let it be simple for him!
 But he showed up with the victor's wreath,
 crazed by glory, insane with praise,
 and brought to my period of mourning
 a prophetess, young and off her rocker,
 Cassandra, *a virgin*,
 the daughter of the King of Troy
 whom he had married, on the sly,
 supposedly on account of
 her elegant descent
 and her talent for prophesying,
 and he passed the nights together with her
 whispering in bed certain oracular words,
 teaching her Greek customs—
 what I simply can't say to you is which ones!
 Tell me, what could I do?—Yes, queen. But also
 a jealous wife, cast off, neglected,
 sacrificed, but without the blood or knife!
 What could I have done with my frantic heart,
 the heart of a woman, a heart like yours,
 what could I do other than calm it,
 other than weep in secret,
 cursing him and damning him
 along with this heart and the hour I was born?
 What was I to do other than seek
 some remedy for my tears,

my sleeplessness,
my grief, my wrecked body,
this wake, and my withering?

(Pause.)

So I discovered a comforter for myself...
O, don't laugh—
I have not finished;
did I say comforter?
I found a handsome one,
a he-man, a lover,
a young stallion, not exactly brilliant
but taken by me,
and ready to burn and butcher on my account...

ELECTRA: You can bet I know all this.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Yes, to butcher—but for me,
because of my body, and my torments,
because of my nights, for my tears,
for my heart, and for my vengeance,
and not for glory or propitious winds!
Yes, and then the great scandal explodes,
but for whom?
For the queen, that wretched woman, for men more easily
skirt
an evil reputation.
And do you think your father would have
given his son in sacrifice for his own glory?
He kills his daughter—and no one cares.
He wed his prophetess—and no one cares.
He forgets about me—and no one cares.
And so I kill. With my lover.

Tell me now: did not I have the right to do him in?

ELECTRA: The right?

CLYTEMNESTRA: If not the right, then sound reason?

(Pause.)

I asked you earlier: where's your child?

I want to see him.

ELECTRA: No rush.

There'll be time for that.
 I too have something to say to you.
 But do not forget
 your final words from earlier.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I'll remember them. No worries.

Perfectly.

ELECTRA: All right then. Listen.

You're no angel
 the way you'd have folks believe.
 You are just like your sister,
 the storied and beautiful Helen...
(Clytemnestra gives a dismissive wave: Eh!)
 yes, yes, in this way: almost equally beautiful
 and just as mad!
 She made a nice marriage from her position of beauty,
 sailed off to Troy and created horror
 and scandal:
 and she slaughtered with her ingenuous smile
 half of Greece!
 But you, her sister,
 you killed only one man:
 the foremost among the first!
 You claim to have an excuse even for that:
 avenging your daughter—so you say.
 But people did not recognize this in you,
 and no one knew what kind of woman you were.
 But I'll say it to you—
 to you and to the world.
 Your travail did not begin when they killed your daughter,
 but rather much much earlier:
 when gorgeous Helen, your illustrious sister,
 drove half of Greece out of its mind with her looks:
 that's when your reason abandoned you—
 because of envy and melancholy.
(Pause.)
 Long before they took your daughter,
 you were hatching infernal plans:

how to blot out once and for all
 the perilous beauty of your sister Helen,
 and in the absence of your celebrated husband,
 sitting forever in front of the mirror,
 consumed by doubts and the desire
 that your husband not return from Troy,
 that he leave you the reigns,
 and you can rule alone,
 but for *your* glory.
 Of all the women of Hellas, you were the only one
 who rejoiced in the victories of Troy!
 But when you caught wind of the triumphs
 of the Greeks,
 you thrashed about
 maniacally enraged,
 eyes brimming with tears,
 and your hair disheveled:
 you were secretly wishing
 for your husband to perish!
 So be it. You were miserable, as you claim.
 You spoiled Helen's good fortune.
 Fine—I understand that.
 But who compelled you to rush after her glory?
 (Wasn't it obvious where fame like that would lead?)
 And could you not wise up by her example,
 and set out on the path to virtue?
 You had a splendid husband—
 You would've become famous through his renown,
 and you had children, daughters and a son;
 you were in a position to live from their glory.
 And that daughter whom they tore from you,
 could not her death,
 famous and horrible,
 have become your bitter glory,
 the black fame of an unfortunate mother?
 And if your husband killed your daughter for the sake of celebrity,
 and if you exact bloody revenge—

why did you drive *us* away,
 my brother and me?
 If you—so your assertion—were a tender mother,
 compelled to atrocity,
 why did that maternal love of yours
 gutter and die
 as it did
 and why drive us, your other children,
 from our home,
 tossing them out on the street like
 mangy cats?
 What did we ever do to you
 in the eyes of god or the world?
 Tell me this, tender mother!
 I know why, and all too well:
 you're ashamed of your lover,
 whom you purchased in the marketplace of vanity,
 bought him for gold coins like an
 expensive stud. That's why.
 The only ones to call these empty tales
 are mad women drunk with lust.
 But don't concern yourself with this, not at all!
 Your reasons are mine!
 As you say, blood's paid back with blood,
 and you're still a frightening demonstration of this now.
 You give justification
 to my rage for vengeance.
 You locate for me reasons and opportunity
 of which I myself had no memory
 since I was punch-drunk from insults.
 But I thank you
 for helping me;
 now it'll be easier to do you in—
 someday—
 you've given me every reason to do so
 just as that stallion of yours
 will pay me with his head.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Leave him out of it.

ELECTRA: I will not touch him.

Orestes will take care
of that judgement. When he returns.

CLYTEMNESTRA: As for me—by you?

ELECTRA: Yes. Me.

With the help of my brother.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I know that you always did love your father
more than me. In the same way
I favored your younger sister.
But sufficient grounds to hate
it is not.

I forgive your transgressions.

Forgive me mine.

I am your mother.

For, fickle deceptions notwithstanding,
regrets and doubts ravage my soul:
faced with the magnificent fact of death,
all human works are mirage-like and vain,
amidst the lines of time everything appears trivial:
everything except life,
that is.

Forgive me, then.

When you reach my years,
with the breath of age tagging you,
when you discover the first hairs of gray,
that's when you'll grasp it,
the same way as I.

ELECTRA: Though it is too late!

CLYTEMNESTRA: I know it.

Too late.

ELECTRA: There's no remedy for this.

CLYTEMNESTRA: May my example be a lesson to you.

ELECTRA: But why do you not recall your son,
who is wandering about the world?

CLYTEMNESTRA: I fear revenge.

ELECTRA: But why incite your husband against us?

CLYTEMNESTRA: I am keeping him calm, actually. His temper is such.

You are volatile as well.

ELECTRA. Yes. Pain did that.

CLYTEMNESTRA: It's the same with me.

ELECTRA: But you'll find your cure.

Don't you worry.

CLYTEMNESTRA: And Aegisthus will be on better terms with you both.

ELECTRA: Oh, your royal stud?

Won't it be too late?

CLYTEMNESTRA: There you go again.

ELECTRA: You're right.

Only the best for Aegisthus.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Why then did you call me here?

Where's your child?

ELECTRA: I summoned you so you could make my son,
now past ten days of age,
a sacrifice. I'm unskilled at that.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Then why not call a midwife?

Whoever helped you through labor?

That's her job.

ELECTRA: I went through the harrowing pain
all by myself.

And bit the umbilical cord in two
like a she-dog.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Why didn't you call for someone
from the neighborhood?

ELECTRA: There are no friends in need, little man.

That's what Strophius the Phocian says.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Fine then. Let us go.

I'll prepare an offering to the gods
for the benefit of your child.

Then back I go to the estate
where Aegisthus awaits me.

He's also preparing a sacrifice for the gods.

I guess all these sacrifices,
and the prayer and the gifts,

ELECTRA

and the speeches and laurels,
will net us salvation.
(*Goes into the house.*)

ELECTRA: Watch your gowns!

Wouldn't want to stain those!

CHORUS: With this color of blood...

or:

Hail, o queen!

FINAL SCENE

Clytemnestra, Electra, Orestes.

(Darkness. Clytemnestra's cries blend in with the singing of the chorus. The screaming of a woman about to be butchered. Afterwards struggle, a fall, lamentation. Clytemnestra, maimed, rushes forth from the house. Electra and Orestes rush out and overtake her.)

CLYTEMNESTRA: Woe is me!

ELECTRA: (*Out of her mind with rage and pain.*)

That is for my father!

CLYTEMNESTRA: Alas! Zeeuuuusss!

ELECTRA: That's for Aegisthus!

CLYTEMNESTRA: Alas!

ELECTRA: That is for Orestes!

ORESTES: I forgive her.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Oh, children of mine!

ELECTRA: And this is for my own suffering!

(Death rattle, collapse. Clytemnestra's body twitches and then remains motionless. The chorus falls silent. Complete stillness. Only the dripping of a small fountain can be heard. A knife is tossed away and lands on the ground. Electra's and Orestes' bodies slowly start to quake, and their petrified stances transition into contortions. Suddenly Electra shrieks and throws herself on Clytemnestra once more, and she appears to be cursing her.)

(Curtain.)

MARIN DRŽIĆ

ALWAYS LANDS ON HIS FEET



Through the streets of Dubrovnik silent people pass, carrying armloads of dried boughs. Some distance away, beyond the gates, they lay them down on the paving stones of the street.

A boy, barefoot and chipper, moves past with a torch, which he is brandishing high in the air.

As the boy with the burning chunk of pine passes, the blinds on the windows close, and gone are the curious faces that had been there before, staring up and down the street.

Passing in front of the café of one Niko Crjevar, the boy swings the torch back and forth, and the smoke makes its way into the wine cellar.

“May God save our city, and abandon me not,” Niko Crjevar says as he crosses himself. Everyone standing by the barrels and large bottles also crosses themselves.

Niko Crjevar tips a bucket of wine, stands with his legs planted wide, and starts to drink in great gulps.

All the people there reach for large bottles, goblets, and glasses, and drink down wine, as if they were at some kind of mass communion.

Niko Crjevar binds up his leather purse containing money, both gold coins and small change, all of which he’s been greedily tossing into the little bag.

“It’s made its way to us...See, it’s here”...And he crosses himself again. “May God save our city, and abandon me not!”

All of them, in unison as in a chorus at mass:

“Amen!”

In the house of Don Marin, close to the Ducal Palace.

Don Marin *fil*s, approximately twenty years old, sits not far from the window, at a writing desk. In front of him are paper and an inkwell. He stares out at the sea. Then he reads the verses that he had just set down.

“From whom could your elegant cheeks

and golden tresses fail to lure words of love?

The paradise of the star-brightened sky is your ornament and pride, and among the *vilas* you have no rival.”

Petra enters and stands over him for some time. Marin is absorbed in thought, murmuring his verses.

Suddenly he turns around.

PETRA:

“Don Marin has summoned you!”

Marin winces and then flips the piece of paper over so that no one would be able to read his poem. He stands up and moves toward Petra, bowing to her in an informal, heartfelt way like a troubadour, and recites:

From whom could your elegant cheeks

and golden tresses fail to lure words of love?

Petra stands there dumbfounded. Then she laughs, as if it were all just another of the Don’s jokes.

“Sir, Don Marin is summoning you.”

Marin climbs the stairs to the upper storey of the house, still reciting in a very low voice, as if he were sleepwalking, the lines of poetry he had just composed.

Half-dressed, wearing slippers, his shirt unbuttoned, his father is pacing about the room. Don Marin *père* is a man of about sixty, corpulent, asthmatic, and agitated.

“What I have to tell you now must not frighten you...Dr. Mednić is now utterly certain...It’s in the city...There’s already been

a first victim, at Danče.¹ The stunts that the Council is going to pull today will not do a whit to help or hinder anything...It has been established that a tailor named Andrija brought in the plague in a load of smuggled wool from Ancona...Just so you know...I fear the lords are going to flee and might leave the city tonight...It's your job to stay with our relatives, and to stand by your church."

Marin is pale, preoccupied, as if he is still scanning his love songs² in his head.

THE FATHER, DON MARIN:

"Don't look at me that way. I'm not crazy...But something is going on with me, too. This morning I woke up, and this upper button on my shirt—hooked! You know that I never deliberately button it. It throttles me....Do you hear what I'm saying? I didn't sleep the whole night, but I must've dozed off for a second. And at dawn I had the feeling—I was being choked. I ran my fingers over my throat and felt it: my neck was stiff....You're an educated man, so tell me: who was constricting my throat? Who in the night, without waking me, put the studs through my eyelets? Who if not...it? Is this not some sort of omen? What do your books say about this kind of thing?"

With that, shouting commenced in the street.

"Andrija the tailor is being brought past!"

Both Marins run to the window. The son leans out, but the father pulls him back.

"Get away from that window!"

He lowers the blinds with a loud rattle.

Marin then pulls them back up a wee bit while his father goes around the room extinguishing candles with his bare fingers.

"String up the plague, my lords, the plague...Yes, so it is. Just capture it! Get your iron hooks into it, *signori*, and not Andrija the tailor. Put a sack over *its* head, and lead *it* around the city on a

¹ A beach area just outside the city walls.

² The phrase used here for love songs, "pjesni svoje ljuvene," is evocative of the famous lyrics of our Marin Držić's uncle, Džore Držić (1461–1501), a contemporary of the great poet and dramatist of Split, Marko Marulić (1450–1524) of Split. Marulić was known as the father of the Croatian Renaissance, while a later poet from Dubrovnik, Ivan Gundulić (1589–1638), is considered the greatest Croatian literary figure of the Baroque.

cord,” Don Marin muttered. This was the father, watching, over his son’s shoulders, the scene playing out through the crack in the shutters.

Guards, their swords drawn, walked along with slow steps, one in front of the other, as in a religious procession.

The winter morning was cold, and steam spouted from people’s nostrils.

The city was abandoned. There was no one in the streets...On the windows, lowered blinds, but behind them peered forth curious and alarmed sets of eyes.

Andrija the tailor was bound with long ropes held by the guards, who were standing at a considerable distance from him. They had put a sack over his head.

The first guard stands far out in front of him, and the other two are off to the sides, behind him. They are taking great pains to lead him directly down the middle of the street, constantly tugging him backwards and forwards.

The bound tailor, Andrija, stumbles past.

“String it up, lords, string *it* up...” whispers the older Don Marin, craning over his son’s shoulders...And then he crossed himself devoutly—fearfully, quickly. Three times in quick succession.

“Well, praise God, at least the papal confirmation of your ordination has arrived...Right at this fortuitous hour...But it is well and good for you, my fine boy. Go to Koločep,³ to your church, and to your congregation. They can do what they want with me, really...I am old, and there are no complaints against me...Take your mother over to Koločep also, along with your sisters. Vice and I will stay...Look at Andrija, that wretch. He’s falling down of his own accord. They are dragging him simply to give him more bruises and scrapes...Well, the doctors say there’s no doubt about it: in the feverish stage there’s discharge in one’s joints...Look: see how he is no longer capable of getting back to his feet...He’s crawling...See how he presses his head to the paving stones: the fever is raging in his cheeks, and it probably feels to him, in his misery, that he can sense the cool of the stones through the bag.

³ A small island in the Adriatic close to Dubrovnik.

The diggers,⁴ known as *kopci*, stop in hesitation. They gaze at the body of Andrija, wrapped up in rope, with the soles of his feet showing.

“And it’s not two months hence”—Don Marin the father is speaking as if to himself, while down below the guards are bickering around Andrija—“it’s not two months hence since we were in Šimun’s tavern celebrating Andrija’s successful return from Naples. By the way, he brought back a load of Vice’s goat skins...Andrija is as honest as the day is long...The poor guy wanted to add on a wing to his house and surround himself with a wall, and that’s why he set off for Ancona...So help me St. Rochus, they won’t have an easy time of it dragging him to the marketplace...I think you can see that the best thing to do is this: you should all go to Koločep, and Vice and I will remain here, in the city. So that people won’t say of us that we panicked at the plague, like the aristocratic whores we are, and that we were the first to take to our heels. Well, those people on the Council won’t be long for this place, have no fear...Tomorrow they’re debating who is to stay and who’s to go, and also who is staying voluntarily...Everyone wants to stay, the entire city, as medical commissioners...So then there’s no longer any disgrace in fleeing...That’s why we’ll be on Koločep.”

The guards have now agreed all to pull as one on their ropes, each from his position. They are dragging Andrija, hauling him over the paving stones.

From inside the bag, groans and screams.

On the square in front of the Ducal⁵ Palace, a fire has been started. Light thrown off by the flames is dancing on the bell towers, along the walls and in the windows of the houses. The only people gathered around the fire are a crowd of the homeless and indigent who have made their way here from somewhere. They are warming themselves by the fire. Next to the fire are large stacks of logs, rafters, and planks. Some of the planks bear evidence of having

⁴ The reference here is to miners from Dubrovnik, known as *kopci* (sing: *kopac*), who played an pivotal role in the Republic’s economy.

⁵ The head of government in Dubrovnik was known as a *knez* or *rektor*, which admits of translation as either duke or rector (from the Latin).

once been part of a ship: there are mussels and seaweed attached to them.

The paupers are the ones that the *kacamorti*⁶ have assembled from the surrounding areas. They've been put into service helping to maintain the health of the citizenry in the event of an epidemic.

An official from the Council arrives, accompanied by a couple of the down-and-out men. One of them is carrying a wooden bucket of wine, and the other has rolls to eat. At a sign from the commissioner, they place their items on a stone close by the fire. Everyone approaches, reaching out for the bread. Then they drink from the pail, elbowing each other for a turn. Finally they tip over the bucket, after which they toss it into the fire, causing sparks to become airborne.

At another sign from the official, they start heaving the logs and rafters into the fire. The fire blazes up, higher and higher. It is a true pyre now.

Down *Placa*⁷ a tumbrel comes with a clatter. The same men who'd been dragging Andrija are among them, only now they're rolling him on a cart, because they can pull him no further. Andrija the tailor is lying on the heavy planks of the cart, tied down with rope. The diggers are pulling the cart, four of them, tugging on long ropes, as if to stay as far away from the moribund as possible.

Around the cart, on both sides of the broad *Placa*, there are many guards. And some members of the Council, as well as a few of the Council's guards a bit farther on, are carrying halberds.

The cart stops near the fire.

Urchins sit on their heels near the fire, stirring it with pokers. They are covering long tongs with live coals.

One of the diggers goes over to Andrija with some tongs and adroitly tears the bag off his head. A collective cry rises up. As if he wants to raise his head, Andrija convulses, but the back of his head falls back onto the boards with a bang.

His face is covered in running blood, as if tearing off the sack

⁶ The well-organized administration of Dubrovnik included many officials who carried out tasks as varied as fire prevention and customs screening. The *kacamorti* were medical commissioners who were charged with limiting the spread of the plague.

⁷ *Placa* is the main street of Dubrovnik, also known as the *Stradun* or *Corso*.

abraded the clotted blood and wounds even more. His broken arm hangs down over the wheel.

An elderly man, appointed and paid by the council, unrolls a sheet of paper and reads the verdict. Then he rolls the paper into a tube and signals to the people kneeling by the fire.

They stand up, holding in their hands, which are wrapped in rags, the long forceps with their red-hot jaws.

The one who reaches Andrija first lowers the tongs onto his side. Andrija's body twists to the side, stretching the cord taut. The man who was holding the tongs loses his balance following Andrija's spasm and his shouts, and the tongs fell from his hands and echoed on the paving stones.

Standing among those who have crept from their houses to come to at the fire is Niko Crjevar. His eyes white-hot, a look of horror on his face, he whispers:

"Break his bones, you loathsome curs; tear his heart out, his heart, aha, like that, like thaaaaaaat...."

The diggers go into the convent of St. Clare. They go down to the cellar. There they dig a burial pit in the clay-rich soil. Ten nuns, wrapped in white linen, are already lying there, ready for interment.

The diggers use pitchforks to shove them over to the hole, and then push them into the pit, one after the other. They toss in a little dirt and then return the flagstones to their places.

They reach Šimun's tavern. It is empty, and the door, ungreased, squeaks.

The interior is dark. They light a torch. On the floor, close to overturned flagstones and scooped-out holes, lies Petra, Šimun's daughter. In the hole is loose soil, and they tread on the knife she had used to dig the hole.

Petra is wearing a black veil over her face, and on her bare chest her arms lie folded. Between her clenched fingers is a rosary. A doctor with a mask stands by her. The priest was in the process of extending the host to her with a long pair of tongs. The doctor gives them a sign to proceed.

They heave her with boat-hooks into the hole. Then they cover her with soil and seal the hole with stones.

Then, with their pitchforks, they reach up to the ceiling and retrieve two or three smoked hams. They start to eat them, tearing them with their teeth and jostling each other. Finally someone brings over a knife, the one they had found next to the hole, and they begin to hack at the bones, detaching pieces of meat from them.

One young digger manages to get his hands on a barrel in the corner and smashes open the plug in it with the handle of his knife. Wine bursts forth in a stream, and the men strike and shove each other to get under it.

The oldest among them gets mixed up in the fray and tries to appropriate the stream of wine. The man who smashed open the barrel now smacks him in the face with a large gnawed bone. They all laugh drunkenly. All the while the diggers are doing the work they're paid to do, their overseer and scourge trailing along behind them like a shadow; he's a functionary named Vlahuša, whose duty it is to prevent them from coming into contact with healthy people or from overlooking some contaminated article and leaving it in the street. However drunk and crazy they become, they don't forget that Vlahuša's power is great and that the penalty for transgression is—the gallows.

Inebriated, wallowing in the puddles of wine that they're lapping up off the paving stones, one of them, catching sight through the split door of Vlahuša, who is following behind them, omnipresent and black as the shadow of death, yells:

"Look over there! Vlahuša is sticking his nose in the lock!"

Everyone comes to his senses with a start, despite the drunkenness.

Then the youngest of them pulls away from the group, his side pressed to the wall, quietly unbuckling his belt.

He lowers his pants and brings his naked buttocks up to the level of the lock and the keyhole through which the agent of death—Vlahuša—is peering at them and sniffing at the spilled wine.

The boy breaks wind with all his might, and then drops to his knees.

They all howl with laughter.

Stumbling with drunkenness, they finally arrived in the patrician quarters of Šimun's family. There lay Šimun, dead. He had torn the silk coverlet from the canopied bed (and intended evidently to cover his dead Petra with it); there he lay on the floor, half-swaddled in it.

A liturgy in All Saint's in Dubrovnik (the "Domino" church).

Don Marin the younger in clerical garb. In the church a large number of Marin's relatives have assembled, including his parents, sisters, and brothers.

A solemn *Te Deum*.

Father Radulović leads the young priest into the church. He speaks first in Latin, and then in the vernacular.

"Youth is no hindrance to entering the Lord's grace...As long as the soul is dedicated to God...Now, my fine young man, you should forget about musical instruments and songs and worldly music, in favor of the salvation of souls and the ascension to heaven...You are required, my boy, to forget the *kolo* and other dances, and lutes, and flutes and other things you blow, along with violins and cornettos, monochords and clavicembalos, harpsichords, and other things you pluck...To him whom the Almighty has given all these gifts, as he has given to you and your uncle Džore, who had these same duties and office, will forget them easily if his heart is truly filled with the mercies of paradise...For whoever knows how to play all of those instruments, he has a soul, because music is a sign of God's presence, my beautiful boy...And here you have an organ, an angelic instrument that encompasses in itself every harpsichord and clavicembalo, all guitars and violins, so do the honorable thing, my boy, for your father and mother and your uncle, the famous Džore...so that the common folk and the lords and all the people of Dubrovnik forget all the mishaps that have befallen you."

The vicar placed a cap on the younger Don Marin's head and bestowed upon him the "kiss of peace", after which he gave him the keys to the church while standing in front of the altar....

The animated faces of his parents; kisses, tears. A few lords who found themselves witnessing all this gave Martin sarcastic

looks as he was being transformed into a man of the cloth: Giving up songs and love and roguery, really, my dear Marin?⁸

Everyone has already left the church. It is evening. Don Marin the younger is seated at the organ. He's playing hymns. After a while, gradually, imperceptibly, he switches over to secular music and begins playing with sincere inspiration.

Fr. Radulović, the man who had ordained him, enters.

"What are you doing, my dear boy? What is this?"

In front of the Držić house, close to the palace. A hot summer day. The people have gathered: the patricians and the plebeians, the Jews and the urban poor.

Before the house stands a drummer, striking his instrument.

Then an official shows up, attired in formal, ceremonial clothing.

He unrolls a coil of paper and reads:

"Sixteen rooms, four large balconies and two small ones, one large and small tavern,⁹ one new brigantine...starting price, 5,000 *perpers*¹⁰.....Who'll go higher, good sirs?...Going once!"

The Držićes are at the gathering, standing over to the side. Don Marin and his sons are following the auction, and the women are dismantling the household. By the door to the house stands a cart loaded with items that are not going to be sold off: Marin's musical instruments.

The priest, this same Radulović, comes up to Marin. "My dear boy, no need to pine. Look here—we've been wanting for an organist at the cathedral...And you, son, are a musician...and until someone else is found who..."

⁸ Marin Držić's nickname, mentioned as a supplemental epithet to his given and family names almost everywhere, is *Vidra*, which in Croatian refers to an otter, or a person so resourceful, adaptable, and quick-witted as to be perhaps a touch shady. The designation *vidra* is used in this sentence for Držić, as well as in the title of the play.

⁹ Even though the Držić family does not belong to the elite, they are still wealthy enough to engage in the philanthropic and status-securing custom of operating public kitchens or subsidized taverns on their property.

¹⁰ The *perper* (Croatian) was a basic unit of currency in Dubrovnik. The name derives from the earlier Byzantine coin called the *hyperpyron*. Sometimes the Croatian coins are also referred to as *hyperpers* in English. Also in use in Dubrovnik at the time were the more valuable *škudas* and ducats.

Marin assents and expresses his thanks.

"This organ is an angelic instrument," Fr. Radulović asserts, admonishing him with his finger.

"Angelic, most assuredly..."

Don Marin *films* is playing the organ in the cathedral. A large number of people have come to see and hear him. Young lords and maid-servants, male and female commoners. One of the plebeian women winks at him. He smiles faintly in response.

After the mass is over, Marin takes a seat in a lighter and departs for one of the islands in the neighborhood of Dubrovnik for a conversation with Mavro Vetranović, the hermit.

They talk of poetry, and of fate. Vetranović, a hermit and poet, encourages him to persevere through his distress, for poetry equals glory, and everything else is mere vanity.

In the Council, a discussion is in progress about the request that has come from Marin Držić.

The members of the Council are speaking very unfavorably about him. About how the Držićes were once, long ago, also patricians, nobles, but they lost their peerage during a plague in 1348, because they left Dubrovnik against the will of the Senate.

That's when a rancorous altercation breaks out.

"Nowhere in our records are there facts that you can cite to back that up!"

"The people preserved the memory of it."

"It was recorded in the books," one young member of the Council confirmed. He was Držić's friend and an admirer of his poetry.

"Their house was auctioned off to cover debts," someone claims.

"And Marin, the one they call *Vidra*," claim others, "loves the caresses of serving wenches—and the crafting of comedies."

We gradually come to learn about all the intrigues surrounding the Držićes, as well as their actual problems.

"As pertains to the plague," avers one of the young Councilors, "let everyone examine his own behavior first!"

“We drew straws!” everybody protests.

“And who was not begging God for the lot to fall on him, so that he could head for the ships?...Not to mention the folks who took to their heels without the consent of Fortuna and the straws...”

“They were anathematized and expelled forever from the Republic.”

Debate about the level of the stipend.

Quarrels. Voting.

“And what will they say about us in Italy?...That our students are paupers...Moreover these paupers will get up to some kind of knavery there or will commence to stealing...So let’s give them a little bit more.”

“If Baro Zizerović vouches for them, it’s possible...but not more than twelve *škudas*.

“Just so he guarantees with his signature that this money will be used for his studies.”

They vote. They agree on thirty golden *škudas*.

“But that’s not enough for his *panata* and *farinata*!”¹¹ interjected his friend.

“He’s getting what he’s getting.”

The young friend apprises Držić of the Council’s decision.

Marin is embittered. He talks about his utopian project: how it would behoove the Council to share power with the commoners. Then a new subject comes up: Dubrovnik’s security. The young Councilor is confident about the fate of the Republic: cunning and diplomacy, golden ducats and golden words—these form the shield of Dubrovnik, every bit as much as its sturdy walls.

They are leaning on a wall of the citadel. Now and again people stroll past them.

Marin gives his binoculars to his young friend from the Council.

“Have a look!”

In the distance, on the open sea, there is a Turkish ship making for Herceg Novi.

¹¹ *Panata* is a type of hearty peasant soup made with many ingredients and prepared in many regional variants in Italy, while *farinata* is a type of unleavened griddle-cake or flatbread commonly prepared in Central Italy.

Like distant thunder, one can hear the booming of cannon in the citadel at Herceg Novi.

"It's not right," Don Marin says. "It's not a good thing for us *Dubrovčani*¹² to stand here like this, with our arms folded, while Christians are dying in Herceg Novi. See there, the way Hairuddin Barbarossa is getting reinforcements. To think that we dismissed that Spanish emissary with only a few pretty words! That they just continue fighting, along with the Serbs in the fortress there, fighting to the last man, and we work on things the best we can via diplomacy. Later that Spanish courier was found beneath our walls, minus his head...You see, these janissaries of Barbarossa had hauled his body here to within two steps of the *Minčeta*."¹³

"It's not going to be easy for you to depart by ship."

Turkish barques can be seen sailing across the horizon.

"But I simply cannot stay here!" Don Marin says, exasperated.

In a tavern in Siena, our Marino Darsa is telling students and nobles gathered there one of Boccaccio's funny stories: the one about the lady who plays a prank on her drunkard of a husband.

Everyone is bent double with laughter.

Darsa has drained his tankard, and stood up from the table, and now he's alternating acting the parts of the drunken man, his impetuous wife, and her young lover.

The whores are shrieking with laughter.

The proprietress of the tavern approaches him:

"*Signore* Darsa, it's on account of your comedies that the Spaniards are going to clap us into prison and shut down this famous Sienese tavern forever!"

"Allow him, *signora*, to finish his story," the people all shout in unison.

"*Signora*," says Darsa, while in the midst of a clownish bow, "this will remain between us...No one shall inform your esteemed husband that you learned from me how to make a man into a *cornuto*!"

Everyone howls with laughter.

¹² *Dubrovčani* are residents or, especially, citizens of the city or Republic of Dubrovnik. The male singular form in standard Croatian is *Dubrovčanin*, although many variants exist.

¹³ A prominent fortress and tower built into the city walls of Dubrovnik.

The proprietress protests.

“You, *signore* Darsa, are in a joking mood, but the Spanish, you know—”

Darsa manages to interject: “Spanish horns, o divine madam of the most divine tavern in Siena and all the world—they are like all the others...”

At the University of Siena, behind the walls of the monastery and the student dormitory connected to it, there is a state of general uproar.

Students in small groups are passing a proclamation back and forth, debating something in conspiratorial whispers.

From the balcony the canons, old and serious, are casting an anxious eye over the crowd. They sense the agitation among the students.

A bell rings, indicating the start of voting.

The rector is sitting on the podium, a distinguished and gray-headed canon, at the head of the clerical council. On a second bench, over to the side, two students who are candidates for the post of rector of the *Domus Sapientiae*,¹⁴ which is at the same time the post of vice-rector of the university.

After a distinguished personage—the priest with the greatest seniority—introduces the issue to be discussed, a young canon takes the stage. He points out the distinguishing characteristics of his candidate, the Portuguese Martino Lupo, who is currently already serving as rector.

His speech boils down to this: why alter something that is going well? *Signore* Lupo has been a model rector, and he is honorable, and not once has he neglected his duties or started conflicts with the students, etc., etc. He should, therefore, be re-elected.

Commotion among the students. Whispered promptings.

A student stands up and elaborates his views: they, the students, are against *Signore* Lupo. Because he has become overbearing. He is greedy and spleenish. The Iberian students protest that they are for Lupo, but they are in the minority.

¹⁴ The student dormitory or residential college.

When his candidacy has been sufficiently battered, it is time to nominate the second candidate, Jakovo Tedesco.

Two or three German students give their opinion: *Il Tedesco* is an ideal candidate, a brilliant student, ranked first in canon law and with flawless Latin. And he knows Greek just as well, and the *Decretum Gratiani* by heart, so to speak.

The students object. Criticism. Tumult, protests.

Now another student takes the floor and suggests Marin Darsa.

Open-hearted, learned, amusing, fair-minded, etc.

The objections of the others (the Iberian and German factions): Darsa is a comedian, fun and laughter lie closer to his heart than canon law, he plays ballads on the organ, etc., etc., and even as a debtor he isn't reliable: he already owes certain sums to four people and he hasn't paid them back yet. His creditors, when they demand repayment, he answers with a witticism: "What does money mean to you, my brothers in Christ? Don't you know, you wretch, that the Lord drove the money-changers out of the Temple?"

The prelates, worn out by this protracted squabbling, finally assent to the idea that Darsa should be included among the candidates.

Darsa, however, is not present, although this is a requirement for candidacy. He lives in the city.

"Have him brought over in a cart. The sooner, the better!"

Darsa, his feet upon a table, is playing the mandolin and singing, together with an assortment of friends—but quietly, so that the Spanish guards don't get wind of it. Even the proprietress of the tavern is singing along now. She is reconciled. And merry.

At the banging of the door-knocker, everyone stops. Darsa hides his instrument behind the casks.

The tavern-owner pounds her fists against her chest: behold, calamity! Spanish guards!

Who is it?

"I'm looking for *Signore* Darsa! I'm a buddy of his, a student."

"There's no Darsa here."

"O, *signora*! The only person here who can play the mandolin like that is the man from Dubrovnik. Open up! I urgently need to see him."

Marin emerges, slips out through the door. He heads off with the student.

The student explains the situation to him along the way: he simply needs to accept the duties, the responsibilities, of the rector of the *Domus Sapientiae*, since that would be to the benefit of everyone.

Darsa responds that he couldn't care less about this honor; he has his Muses, and they have no interest in obligations of this sort.

Then the student proceeds to expound upon all the advantages that come with this invitation; for one, he'll receive double portions at meals. That is to say, he'll draw half of the rations of his assistants; for another matter, those assistants will not be Portuguese, or German.

Why not Germans? Darsa asks.

Because last night German troops marched into the city to reinforce the Spaniards!

Now Darsa assents:

"Gentlemen, brothers: against tyrants and occupiers I will direct all my energies, for whoever loves men cannot love tyrants and masters. And these supercilious Spaniards who have banned mummery and comedies by saying that the people are not allowed to assemble—they have, my lords and brothers, committed a mortal sin, for they are hoping to silence both the actors and the *vox populi*, and the actors are the only people in this world who speak the truth even when they lie...And as for the doubled meal portions, I turn them down, in a spirit of generosity. I'll share food with the birds of God's creation, like St. Francis...if the haughty nobles back in Dubrovnik will permit me a bit more room for such presumption and philanthropy...But when someone's stomach growls, he doesn't think about birds. He thinks about his stomach...Musicians and poets romance their muses and their *vilas*, and a stomach that gnaws frightens off such creatures..."

Darsa is elected!

Now, like any new member of the house, he must arrange for a feast for the older students, as the custom dictates.

Darsa tries to extricate himself from this obligation, but the students harass him. Then Marin requests that the administration

abolish the custom altogether, because he considers it burdensome. The administration takes exception to this.

Piccolomini was on Darsa's side, laying out the arguments in a philosophical way.

Marin runs into trouble with the wealthy students and the nobles. As well as with the administration. At a public meeting, he upbraids the directors for curtailing many of the rights of the students, for instance by subjecting them to such strict discipline that they are not allowed to play music together, etc.

Darsa is even able, as the head of a delegation of students, to make an appearance before the Senate. He sets forth his views. The haughty senators refuse to concede his points. He is requesting more freedom, so they warn him to watch out above all for himself and his own behavior, for a great number of his escapades and debts are known to them.

Darsa grows furious and throws away his *vestis*¹⁵ as well as the black rector's sash he was wearing across one shoulder.

But the students convince him to take up his duties again, and to don that distinctive rector's clothing once more. Piccolomini also has this advice to him: it's better to fight than to prostrate oneself before failure.

Behind the lowered curtain: commotion and whispering of actors and the stage-manager. An actress (a man dressed like a woman, that is) is peeping out through the curtain.

From the other side of the curtain, from the theater, comes applause. The audience is impatient.

The stage-manager sets one of the actors' masks to rights. One of the viewers grabs the rear-end of the "courtesan." Everyone, besides the stage-manager, is wearing a mask.

The curtain rises.

CALANDRO: ...*Cancher ti venga! Oh castron che io sono! Avevo fallito. E ben ho fatto a bestimiar quella perché questa qua é Santillamia, non quella...Buon di...*

And so on.

LIDIO MASCHIO: *Pillera! Questo matto mi stima donna...*

¹⁵ A special black cloak that symbolized authority.

CALANDRO: *Eimé! Lei non e dessa...*¹⁶

Etc., etc.

(Bernardo Dovizi de Babbiena: "La Calandria," III, 23.)

Laughter in the audience. Open-stage applause (in mid-scene).

In the hall there are scarcely twenty audience members. This is the truly sumptuous, large salon of Buoncampagna della Gazzaia, respected citizen of Siena.

In the first row are seated members of his family as well as a few prominent citizens. The host's place is in the middle of the first row. Before the first act he had recited the prologue to the comedy and then taken his seat again.

All of a sudden, powerful knocks are heard at the door. With the clapper and with fists. The actors stand paralyzed on the stage. The host, *Signore* Buoncampagna, signals to his guests which way they should run, and attempts to bring a little order to the scene. Panic has broken out, and people are trying to save their own skin the best they can. Those who had made a dash toward a hidden exit return in short order: at all the entrances to the house Spanish soldiers are posted, with their helmets on and swords and halberds drawn.

"*Silenzio!*"

With that the captain of the Spanish detachment climbs up onto the abandoned stage.

"The ladies and gentlemen should not attempt to flee, for the building is surrounded and all entrances are blocked! In conformity with the decree that forbids public gatherings and masquerades, you are all under arrest and will be brought before the court," the captain said, in a heavy Spanish accent. "Actors, please remove your masks. It is too late now for masks."

The closely guarded *Signore* Buoncampagna stands there without moving, his arms wrapped protectively around his wife. At

¹⁶ CALANDRO: ...A pox on you! What a fool I am! I had failed. I had good reason to curse that one because this is my Santilla, not that one....Good day.

LIDIO MASCHIO: This is crazy! The fool thinks I am a woman

CALANDRO: Alas! That's not her...

the same time the other guards are ferreting out the actors who've taken refuge behind the set; they're tugging them out of corners.

The guards rip off the skirt of one of the actors, the one who'd been playing the role of the paramour. Now his hairy legs heave into sight below his dolman. One actor wriggles free and challenges the Spaniards to a duel; he is brandishing a stage sword. The soldiers roar with laughter. Another guard removes a mask from an actor's face, puts it on his own, and accepts the challenge. The swordfighting plays out on stage. For a moment, everyone in the theater forgets his or her role as detainee or usurper and watches the farcical sword-play: a genuine sword against a prop.

"Olé!"

In the twinkling of an eye a masked actor hurls the stage curtain over the guard's head. The soldier falls, entangled in heavy brocade. The actor lifts up the bewildered guard and bows to the audience. Then the guard bows as well, although he manages to heckle the actor and threatens to pay him back for this once they are off the stage.

Everyone applauds.

The actor pulls the mask off the guard, and introduces him thus:

"The Spanish guard, a participant in the forbidden production!"

Then he removes his own mask and bows.

"Marinus de Rausio, *rector domus sapientiae et vice-rector universitatis studii senensis*."

There is applause and laughter in the hall. The title he gives seems too comical for anyone to believe him. Everything points to the actions of a good actor and impersonator.

The trial.

A crowd pushes into the courtroom: citizens, nobles, students. Numerous Spanish sentries, posted everywhere.

The judge reads the statements that were made in investigative detention.

Signor Buoncampagna admits that in his home, on February 10, 1542, despite the ban on assemblies, etc., he organized for his friends a masquerade in which he himself participated by reading the prologue.

Next defendant: Marinus de Rausio, *rector domus sapientiae et vice-rector universitatis studii senensis*.

JUDGE: "Did you take part on 10 February 1542 in the performance at the home of *Signore Buoncampagna*?"

THE ACCUSED: "No, your honor! You are familiar with the fact that actors lie to such a degree that nothing they say can be believed. A man who is playing a part faithfully cannot even say that he is himself. I, therefore, was not myself!"

Question to a witness: "Did *Signore Darsa* act in the performance? If so, in what role?"

"The lover."

JUDGE (dictating for the record): "*Marinus de Rausio....magnificus Rector Sapientiae, qui amasium in ea comedia egit...*"

The next defendant was wearing a *dolman*. His bare hairy legs were also visible.

Laughter in the room.

The judge reads the verdict:

All of the actors (considered artisans in Siena) are exiled from the city for a period of four months. in addition, *Signore Buoncampagna* must pay a fine of...etc.

Signore Marin Darsa, in light of his responsibilities, is exempted from banishment; his sentence is suspended....

The students clap their approval.

Having lost interest in his studies, Marin returns home. On the way he and an adventurer named Sorkočević drop in to see Marin's brother, Vlaho, who is living in Venice.

Vlaho is a fur merchant, but he is also an artist—a painter and sculptor.

"What is this, Vlaho? I come here to your country to learn art the Sieneese way, only to find these Spaniards have forbidden gatherings and the wearing of masks."

In their conversation with Vlaho, the two men recapitulate the political situation at home: the Turkish menace, ill-conceived policies of the Dubrovnik landowners, as well as all of the outrages committed by the executive authorities. (A good portion of these criticisms will figure later in their letters to Medici.)

Soliciting loans from door to door to get enough money for the journey to Dubrovnik.

The Austrian aristocrat and commander-in-chief (and Casanova, adventurer, and so on), Christoph Rogendorf, disembarks in Dubrovnik (in the year 1543).

The festivities of his formal reception in the harbor, music.

In the Senate they are discussing what position to take regarding Rogendorf.

Spies, and people who have his confidence, submit reports about his movements and his clashes with the Austrian court. In actuality Rogendorf is traveling to Istanbul in secret, to offer his services to the Sultan.

The Councilors pass a resolution: he will be kept under surveillance and the snooping will continue, and we will also extend all appropriate honors to him and give his case continued attention. He might need us later!

Flattery, entertainments.

Rogendorf is irritable, dispirited. The whores brought in to distract him and get him talking are no consolation to him.

At this point someone remembers Don Marin, who knows how to put on farces.

He is summoned. Marin, very much in the spirit of his character Pommet, and almost in the exact same words that Pommet used when sitting at table with his master Ugo Tudešak, begins to entertain Rogendorf and the lords over their meal.

He picks up a piece of meat from his plate, examines it.

"I'm looking to see, my lords, whether it is a goose or something else: I've never laid my eyes before on a beast of this size. Roasted? Well, I'm going to look to see if it's charred or cooked. It has some May bugs on it that are bewitching my eyes, making my heart brim over with mirth, stripping the clothes off my appetite, etc.

*"Trink, Mr. Christoph, star allegro, signora star vostra!"*¹⁷

¹⁷ A humorous polyglot line: "Drink, Mr. Christoph! Be happy, and may the woman remain yours!"

Marin drinks and eats, while the lords laugh with their mouths full! Sir Christoph Rogendorf cheers up: he needs a man like this around him, merry and smart, and well-versed in languages to boot.

Then and there, right on the spot, at table, they come to an agreement: Marin Držić will enter the service of Lord Christoph Rogendorf as a valet.

They bring an inkwell and paper and draw up a contract: Marin Držić of Dubrovnik will loyally and honorably serve Lord Rogendorf in the capacities of valet and interpreter, against payment of two ducats per month, plus clothing, and the customary minor gifts.

“*Vivat!*”

The matter must be sealed by a drink.

Thus the Senate will have its man close to Rogendorf.

“*Bravissimo, Signore Marin!*”

In the harbor, before the departure of the ship that will start Rogendorf, and his expanded retinue, on their journey to Vienna. (Rogendorf has temporarily mended his fences with the court there.)

Marin puts on his comedies on the pier, for the amusement of the gentlemen who had come to see them off, in the manner of Longnose,¹⁸ expounding, in the form of parables, some of the ideas that we will later find in the letters to the Medicis:

“I, Longnose, necromancer, am setting forth India the Great, where a people exists that does nothing but petition God for the favor to deprive vanquished monsters, who are disarmed, mad, and useless, of their unproductive hair, because they have in India the Great addle-pated leaders who consider themselves wise but aren’t worth beans. They are impotent invalids, but their arrogance is still unbearable.” Etc., etc.

The gentlemen applaud. Rogendorf pats him on the shoulder, and Marin takes a bow.

“And now, my manifolded little squires, *addio!*”

At the crack of dawn (in the autumn or winter of 1546), from a ship that has dropped anchor in the harbor at Dubrovnik, our

¹⁸ Dugi Nos (Longnose) is a character in Držić’s play from the 1550s, *Dundo Maroje*.)

Marin disembarks, dejected, not greeted by anyone, with his pitiful luggage. One person actually is waiting for him: his friend Vetranović. The poet and hermit to whom Marin will eventually spill the beans about all his adventures: the trip to Vienna, the journey to Istanbul, as well as the reasons why he agreed to travel with that owl-brained buffoon Rogendorf: he had a desire to see the world and to put some distance between himself and the arrogance of the Dubrovnik gentry, for he had had enough of entertaining them while observing their misrule. Then again he would drop Rogendorf because of the count's connections with some renegades and turncoats from Dubrovnik.

They reach the Palace.

Daybreak. The city is still asleep. They've halted before the Palace. From out of the cellar, cries escape.

Vetranović tugs Martin in another direction: not there. It's something that a person with a sensitive soul, a person with a heart, would not be able to endure: this is where they've walled up that unfortunate fellow, Mihočević, alive.

The two poets converse in conspiratorial whispers and remind each other of all of the judicial injustices and autocratic excesses that the aristocrats have committed: they speak of the clergyman whom (because of suspicion that he took for safekeeping some money that a servant girl had stolen) they twice subjected to torture and then left with his arms strung up by ropes, so that he died; about how, in the case of a villager who quarreled with an aristocrat's serf and killed him, the villager's brother was the one actually arrested. The judge pronounced him not guilty. Then the estate-owner, the master of the murdered serf, took the floor in the courtroom: "These peasants, therefore, are so insolent that they do away in this fashion with a landowner's farmhands? But you, with no further ado, let them go scot-free?" Judge: "In our opinion this man is innocent; what would you have us do to him?" Estate-owner: "String him up three times with a cord, so that his brother learns what it means to kill the servant of a landowner."

They listened to him.

They spoke about the bankrupt Levantine merchants; about the youths who got in a fight with a house-boy who belonged to a

squire; and about the cruelty of judicial sentences; about how they exiled a group of four friars from prominent houses.

Etc.

They reach a tavern which is just in the process of opening for the day. They order a large bottle of wine. They return to the Palace, and, looking around to make sure no one can see them, they push the wine through the hole in the wall used for deliveries. The unfortunate Mihočević thanks them and then swears.

On the area in front of the Palace of the Rector of Dubrovnik (the place known as “*prid Dvorom*”) a stage has been set up. Landowners are seated on chairs and benches.

A crowd of commoners is thronging about. The mood is carnival-like: masks, confetti. Laughter. It’s Mardi Gras.

On the stage stand Miljenko, a peasant, and “the little squire”.

MILJENKO: Peace be with you my lords, and best wishes all around!

Griefs of every kind no longer need leave you in despair—

Pour out merrily the little flowers of roses

To adorn your tender brow and golden hair

O nymph, how dearly I would like to call myself thine,

If it cost my fortune and made me turn away from my sweet home!—

(Makes a move to grab her breast with his hand. Laughter is heard in the audience.)

What kind of flowers are these? Where, dear Lord, shall I go a-plucking?

VILA: Oh shepherd, stop right there! Touching this is not your lot!

MILJENKO: My but you are queerly bedizened!

VILA: But bide there a little.

MILJENKO: She’s ridiculous to look at.

(...)

VILA: Don’t give up the ghost, o shepherd! They will grant you these lands: for those who die, there’s no standing up again.

MILJENKO: Miss, with you I should like to lie one time, even if it means I’ll never get up again.

VILA: How much could you scrape together to sleep with me?

The wind, which during the entire scene thus far has been causing the decor to flap and flutter, as well as the garments of the *vila*, now blows her skirt all the way up, revealing a pair of hairy legs.

Laughter.

The wind turns into an icy tempest. The props wobble precariously.

Miljenko turns to the scenery and backdrop and, yelling over the wind, bellows:

MILJENKO: My heart is howling with cold, for heaven's sake.

DON MARIN (*from backstage, as loudly as he can manage*):

Your heart can explode for all I care.

Play the part as I wrote it!

Then he addresses the actors from behind the stage.

"We're out of luck! The crowd is on the run!"

AN ACTOR: "The Duke has already left."

MARIN (*shouting*): "Who?"

AN ACTOR: "The Duuuuuuukkkkkke!"

MARIN: "Screw the duke!"

At a sign from Marin, the actors attempt to repeat the scene that had flown away with the wind.

The audience members are going their separate ways. The actors' words can scarcely be heard. They had drawn nearer to the proscenium and were yelling at the top of their lungs.

VILA: How much could you scrape together to sleep with me?

MILJENKO (*at full volume*): It's just that I would love getting together with you...

In the cellar, where people have sought refuge from the foul weather, close by the Duke's palace, the winds carried these words through fissures and cracks in the doors.

Inside, sitting on sacks of salt, by a candle with a trembling flame, a young nobleman is seated. He has a mask pulled down over his face. Next to him is a young servant girl, bashful, awkward, intimidated.

"So, sweetie, you see"—the young patrician says—"you've heard that right...It's as if the Lord sent me an answer to your question. Ho, ho—you heard it: '...get together with you...' You heard it, my blushing lass...You are my *vila* from the glade!"

“Oh dear me, my lord,” Ana says. “Be merciful and do not use force with me, for I am a virgin!”

Then the nobleman covered her lips with his, after which he whispered to her:

“You did a saintly piece of work when you fled from your former masters, whom you had served faithfully over the course of years, to us young bucks—and you chose us, these melancholy and gallant runaway gentlemen, to be your protectors...”

A short time later, concealed behind sacks of salt, we see another nobleman, with a crooked mask, and a servant girl decked out for Shrovetide as they embrace. “Oh my, master,” says Ana. “If they catch us, we’ll be thrown into a monastery or slapped into the stocks. Woe unto us!”

“Oh, my blushing maiden,” the nobleman continued, “we will cart you off under the crimson skies of dawn to your gray-headed masters, who currently lie snoring on their upper floors. We will cart you back as you sing at the top of your lungs and are as merry as you can be...”

Then he struggles to her feet, looks at his companion as if shocked by the love-making he’s witnessing, and heckles:

“Bravissimo, *Signore* Danijel! *Con coraggio, con coraggio!*

All at once the door to their closet opens, and, huffing and puffing, a nobleman appears. It’s the owner of the house—Ana’s master. He opens the window wide, as if to grant a better view to his now saucer-sized eyes and prove to himself that he isn’t dreaming: “A *signore*, unknown to him, is sitting on the bin making out with a maid (Isn’t that Ana?), and another man is there by the door, sitting behind sacks of salt, caressing a second girl.”

“O, *per dio santo!*”

Then the man closest to the door, startled, takes hold of his girl and pulls her to her feet. In turn he gives the thickset patrician a shove, causing the window to slip out of his hands and slam shut.

“O, *per dio! Assassini! Assassini!*”

In a patrician home, a banquet. The guests are making merry, and drinking, while blushing maidens squeal with delight.

It is the fifteenth or sixteenth day of a wedding (at any rate one of the thirty days given over to nuptial merrymaking), most likely in the home of Vlaho Držić (1551).

Don Marin enters, looks about, goes from room to room and floor to floor, from the courtyard and the garden to the terrace: everywhere we see there is food and drink in abundance, the wooing of young, heavy-lidded nobles, whose heads are swimming with wine, servant girls carrying baskets of fruit, etc.

Whenever Don Marin approaches a group, everyone turns away from him at once, feigning innocence or ignorance: the young gentlemen either latch onto their consorts so they can whisper something in their ears, or to give them a quick caress, or they would plunge their heads into their tasty morsels and huge chalices of wine, or strike up a conversation with each other. The ladies snicker, the men eat or drink, or engage in conversations, all of a sudden, as if Don Marin's entrance were setting into motion some suspended dialogue, or as if his appearance were reviving a still life or *tableau vivant* of exhausted individuals.

Don Marin calls out "God be praised!"—but no one answers him. It's as if the others had not heard or seen him, and the ladies continue snickering, with their eyes averted, and poor Don Marin cannot get anyone to return his gaze, since everyone is so "awfully, crazy busy" with their work or their chats.

Don Marin, dumbfounded, moves along past guests and members of the wedding party, before suddenly spinning around in the doorway between two rooms: he notices that everyone is gaping at him like at a mummer, but as soon as he turns around they all dropped their eyes and continued their palavering and whispering.

"In the name of St. Blaise and All Saints, what is this?" Marin inquires of his young friend, the same fellow with whom he, from Dubrovnik's fortifications hard by the Minčeta, had watched the Turkish ships through the spyglass, and to whom he had poured out, in the intimacy of deep friendship, his opinions and his bitterness.

The young gentlemen inclines his ear toward his companion and pretends not to have heard what Don Marin tried to say.

"Do you hear me, Sabo? I asked if you know what in the world's going on with these people? It's like they all ate henbane, no?"

Messer Sabo asks him, suppressing his urge to laugh, over his shoulder, nonchalantly, "Oh, which one do you mean?"

"Well—what is wrong with you? Even if this wedding celebration and banquet have been going on for sixteen days already—hey, hey, cheers and good health to the newlyweds!—I doubt that wine has completely swallowed up everyone's reason...Do you know me well, *Signore Sabo*?"

"Well which one was it?" Sabo repeated, emboldened now by the presence of new party-goers who had been hanging about, still pretending to be in the dark, as if they were barely listening to the conversation of the two men.

"Don Marin Držić, Marino Darsa, who knows how to compose comedies..." says Marin, attempting to make a joke out of it all.

Sabo, out of the side of his mouth:

"But you do seem to me to have gotten a little younger...Your hair, it's a bit shorter, and darker. I swear by St. Rochus, *Signore Mavro*, that I hardly recognized you."

Off to the side a few people explode in laughter and spray wine out of their mouths.

Don Marin: "What do you mean calling me Mavro? It's Marin! Marino Darsa! Marin Držić, citizen of Dubrovnik!"

"So you're saying you're the fellow who knows how to make comedies, and I called you Mavro...*Signore Mavro Vetranić*, I guess I said," Sabo continued.

"I do not understand you, brother! Don't mock me. Give it to me straight. You don't have to act like a lunatic simply because you're drunk, Sabo."

Sabo winces.

"I am certainly no longer any brother of yours."

"And what have I done to you?"

"To me and this whole illustrious city!"

Don Marin looks around: now everyone is eyeing him reproachfully. They are finally looking straight at him.

"What do you mean? Be straight with me!" And Don Marin grabs him.

Sabo shoves him away, easily, but with disgust.

"You should not have been so bold as to do that, sir," notes a woman who is seated near Sabo.

"Speak, Madame, and do not leave me in this state."

“You deceived us! We watched that fine *Tirena* of yours until the wind drove us away, freezing, and we all said: ‘Three cheers for Don Marin, and glory to Dubrovnik...’”

The woman averts her eyes.

“My thanks, Madame.”

Sabo intervenes.

“But it was, *Signore* Mavro Vetranić, and not you, who wrote that! Who knows...It could even be that you copied this comedy about Stanac from somewhere.”

Everyone awaits his response.

Marin has to pull himself together after this blow.

“Bear in mind, Madame, and you too, Messer Sabo, and all of those who are listening to me and those who aren’t: you cannot speak this way and do me wrong, for Držić, singing his songs and writing his comedies, will make this town famous!”

He leaves abruptly, crushed.

Several days pass. The wedding festivities are still going on. Music can still be heard in Vlaho’s house.

Old Mavro Vetranović has come in from his island. He is shown great respect as they receive him.

Mavro drains a glass of wine and then strikes up a conversation with Sabo. He defends Don Marin.

“Don’t do it, *Signore* Mavro! Noble gesture, but you consort with *vilas* and muses...” etc.

Mavro requests now that all the wedding guests assemble. He recites the following to them, with gentle pathos:

I beseech each of you on account of kindness,
noble people of Dubrovnik,
who are used to singing heavenly songs,
and to sowing in all directions
so that your youth may enjoy in merriment
for many years all that is pleasurable and joyous
in this world—I beseech you
to please an old man
by not conferring false judgment

as you presently do to Držić,
whose work you value not but
who sings exquisite songs
in front of the palace of the lord.
He's standing right there amongst you,
among you reasonable people going about your day.

The conversations break up and everyone leaves.
Old Mavro continues to recite:

And he filches nothing from anyone
while he racks his brains,
and writes these gorgeous poems
keeping vigil late and without restful sleep.
And when he is fatigued and hoping to sleep,
he finds neither peace nor repose,
for his muse calls to him again like a Hellene,
the muse that feeds him,
the one that rules him,
and who shows him the correct path.
So he can compose poems
smiled upon by reason
as the *vila* does in the grove.

Mavro concludes his recitation. He looks around to assess the
impact his poem has had.

There's no one in the hall. Everyone has departed.

Early morning in Dubrovnik.

The signori from the night before are standing around at the
port, close to a ship that is taking on cargo and preparing for departure. They are pale and haggard from lack of sleep.

Milling about the ship are sailors, merchants, spies, and informers.

There are young men who are obviously looking forward to
someone else's arrival, and every couple of minutes one of them
runs up to the street to see if he or she is coming.

Down the street paved with flagstones, starting up near *Placa*, giant barrels come rumbling and bumping along. They are undoubtedly full of wine. It is the manservant of one of the noblemen who is rolling the barrels down the street.

Now he is just a stone's throw from the harbor. One can hear the way the barrels are smacking the pavement. Voilà—they have reached the pier and are rolling on towards the vessel.

Drunken Guvo, the town fool, sprints up from somewhere to try to help a little—more on a whim than with the potential for being of use.

Prospero, the servant, when he catches sight of his master and his friend, who are dissembling that they do not see him, holds off pushing the barrels further as they roll away from him down the incline, banging and scratching each other, ricocheting off of each other with a dull thud.

Drunken Guvo, probably in the hope that someone would recognize and applaud him for doing it, runs to Prospero's succor.

"Here I am, see! Watch, ol' Guvo will help you, see?"

When Guvo hurls himself at the barrel, it skids off the planks and tumbles into the sea.

Cursing, the young lords spring into action and lean out over the water.

The spies crane their necks nervously, and when from the barrels women's cries of excitement reach them, they look back at the young *signori*: they grasp straightaway what is going on here.

Those nobles yell to the sailors: "Jump in the water! Pull them out and you'll get a gold coin, you nincompoop! You too! Now get in there!...I've got two gold coins, right here! Here's three, you morons, now jump! What, do you think it'll freeze your balls off?"

Along come servants now, toting Ana's master, Lone, in a sedan-chair. The lord's bare feet are slapping the wet paving stones as the servants trot along, and he is spurring them on: so he can lay his eyes one more time on his unfaithful indentured servant.

By the time they reach the harbor, the servant-girls have already been liberated from their barrels, all a-tremble, while the

sailors guffaw on board their ship and curious onlookers gather to watch the proceedings.

Lord Lone, with a bandage around his head and red with rage, screams:

“To the stocks with the unfaithful women! To the stocks!”

The populace has assembled on the square. The people in the back rows are standing on their toes. An uncomfortable silence descends on the crowd.

On the square, with their hands tied and their hair shorn, sit the indentured servants on a bench. These are the ones pulled a couple of days ago from the barrels.

A clerk from the Council is in the process of opening a roll of paper, from which he then reads the sentence.

Next to the girls a priest is standing, who recites a prayer to them.

He moves off and the executioner, wearing a mask, approaches.

The assembled mass of people, which had grown very loud and rowdy, falls abruptly silent.

The executioner picks up a small knife, similar to a razor, from a red velvet pillow offered to him by an assistant.

The executioner grasps the nose of one of the servants, and with the other hand he raises his knife.

A blood-curdling scream.

On the square in front of St. Peter's in Rome, the pope is granting absolution to believers from all over the Christian world.

There are pilgrims from the entire Christian archipelago.

Every imaginable language can be heard: Italian, German, French, Spanish, Dutch...

Marin Držić does a double-take at hearing a torrent of Croatian words from amidst the crowd.

An old man, looking confused and lost in the hubbub, is speaking, as if to himself, and then turns to his servant who is trotting along beside him.

OLD MAN: “Oh my, oh my! Old age, why have you brought me to this? That I should wander from pillar to post in the world, look-

ing for the prodigal son, for that brigand? As if I can pull gold out of the high seas, as if I had access to some bottomless fortune in a cave somewhere. I put five thousand ducats into that child's hands! That's like putting a wolf in charge of your meat. Uff. I should have to turn over twenty-four horses a day, one every hour, on account of the error I made."

SERVANT: "Goodness knows, master, a horsey would come in handy at any time round about now, but it would hardly be able to get us home if you feed it the way you feed me. I've been miserable since the hour we left Dubrovnik!"

OLD MAN: "But didn't I tell you: don't get all fussy and grumpy with me. Complaining doesn't sit well with me. You little drunk, you're making sport of me!"

SERVANT: "You're drunk yourself, and your money-belt knows the condition of my belly better than anybody!"

OLD MAN: "Didn't I already give you half a ladle of wine to drink today?"

SERVANT: "You did. And that totally quenched my thirst. Sorry if I don't shit myself with joy, but since we left Dubrovnik I've not had any food from you...Now, half a ladle of wine. Oh, woe is me!"

Držić is standing close by, grinning as he watches the servant and the old man. He is curious.

OLD MAN: "Oh misfortune! Oh grief!.. My son takes my ducats, and this fellow here sucks the very life out of me!"

SERVANT: "God knows who's cutting whose throat, and who's going to die earliest...My soul is about to take its leave, from hunger and from thirst. You want to feed me with your griping?? You pay out ducats and you have still more rusting in your coffer..."

Držić approaches, beaming.

"Holy St. Blaise! You're my countrymen!...Welcome."

SERVANT: "*Messer*, may God remember you! *De Ragusa*? We hail from there, too."

OLD MAN: "So, you are our countryman? Pleased to meet you...But it very much seems to me that I already know you, sir... Aren't you that poet who knows the trick to producing comedies?"

DRŽIĆ: "Marin Držić, citizen of Dubrovnik!"

OLD MAN (*embraces him*): "Incline your head to me, lord, that I might greet you! I can hardly contain myself when I hear someone using our language."

SERVANT (*joyful*): "One of our own! Let's this be one of our own indeed, and let us be alone no more. How much misery we have encountered, with no one coming to our side save one of our countrymen. Birds of a feather...!"

OLD MAN: "I'm taking heart again now, good sir! When I heard you speaking, I said: 'He's one of us'...But who would've guessed that it was our own famous Marin Držić of Dubrovnik!"

DRŽIĆ: "Is there any news from over there?"

OLD MAN: "They've reinforced the city guard."

Držić recoils. Then he swiftly shifts their conversation to a different subject.

DRŽIĆ: "What is the source of your woes?"

OLD MAN: "I am in trouble!"

SERVANT: "He's crying because his son is dissipating his ducats...But what are ducats for other than drinking, eating, and throwing before swine?"

DRŽIĆ: "Hey, *messer*, this could all be put into a comedy!"

OLD MAN: "This is no comedy, Don Marin. It's a tragedy...I'm in mourning, Don Marin, deep mourning..."

The scene picks up again in the city hall. Marin is, despite the presence of the whole squirearchy, sullen, severe, and irritated. He's hanging around backstage, from where he keeps peeping out.

The stage has been constructed to be a faithful replica of the plaza on which the old man and his servant had stumbled across Držić.

On the stage: Maroje (the Old Man).

MAROJE: "Bokčilo, stand over there to the side, and don't make a fuss. This chap is thinking about wine, and I am in distress, great distress. *Messer*, I can see you are a good man, and I'd like to speak to you a little over to the side, because my good fortune has brought you to me."

TRIPČE: "Sir, I am here, at your command. Give me orders as if I were your brother: I am deeply connected to all *Dubrovnici*. Don't take stock of me in this elegant tunic; I swear by St. Tryphon

that I care not whether they consider me a *signore* and a *messer* in foreign parts, but here at home, where I am known, I'll own I wish to be respected and honorable."

Etc.

Držić can hear part of the script from behind the scenes. Just as he can also hear the delighted laughter of the audience, and the applause. He remains sullen and preoccupied.

Workers are unloading bags of salt from a ship. They carry them over a wooden gangway to the shore, after which they take them into a warehouse. Next to the warehouse is the office of Dubrovnik's salt authority. Don Marin is sitting at a desk and entering into an account-book the dictations of another clerk, who is reading from a set of scales the weight of bags of salt.

"Eighty-five kilos."

MARIN: "Eighty-five."

CLERK: "Eighty-four kilos."

Marin does not respond.

CLERK: "Eighty-four kilos."

Marin is writing, consumed by his own thoughts, on another sheet of paper:

"And concerning the administration of justice, it seems to me indispensable that to Dubrovnik be sent *un capitan di giustizia italiano, huomo di Vostra Eccellentia*, for our rulers have never understood how to dispense justice..."

The clerk, who has moved to Držić's side:

"Have you gone deaf, *per dio*? Why are you not answering me? Or are you writing another comedy? Eh?"

Marin starts and then screens the paper from view so that the other clerk cannot see what he's writing.

MARIN: "Why, yes. A comedy."

CLERK: "Be so kind as to write what I tell you: eighty-four kilos!"

MARIN: "Eighty-four."

Then he resumes, on the other sheet of paper: "It would be meet for Your Excellency to hear more about their criminal ways..."

CLERK: "Eighty-five, and a bit more...Did you hear me?"

MARIN: "I hear you! I hear you!"

In a church in Venice, holy mass is concluding. The Archbishop is officiating.

A much older Marin, now a chaplain, assists at the mass. Amidst the congregation, which is receiving communion, kneel the captain's friends, Luka Sorkočević and Frano Lukarević.

The mass is now over and the congregation disperses.

Clutching their communion wafers, and kneeling in the empty church, only that pair of men remains.

Then Držić the chaplain appears, and at a sign from him the men follow him.

In a secluded part of the church, they converse in whispers.

LUKA: "Has anything arrived?"

MARIN: "Nothing yet. But I trust in God that something will reach us in the next few days."

FRANO: "Did you outline everything for His Excellency?"

MARIN: "Everything...If a person were to describe all of the distress and injustice created by our aristocracy, he would have to pen a book instead of a letter!"

FRANO: "Did you say to him that it is only with a heavy heart that we have come to favor such sweeping change, but that it is on absolutely justified grounds that we appeal to such an impartial and righteous sovereign as him."

MARIN: "I covered it all in great detail, so that he'll be in abreast of the flaws and faults of our Dubrovnik. And I expounded upon the virtues and good intentions of our populace."

LUKA: "I have it from reliable sources that once again, motivated by the fear of incurring the Turks' wrath, they have forbidden the construction or purchase of new ships, under the threat of a tremendous fine!"

MARIN: "They've done that in order to bring to ruin our illustrious fleet, and reduce our presence on the sea to nothing, for would not our glorious nobles still be safe and sound where they're holed up now? Where life seems good?...Meanwhile, that fleet is so much needed today by the West and by Christendom, that once flourishing fleet, which was neither founded nor built by them. Neither did it evolve under their direction, but rather it was the islanders who did all this because it was a matter of survival for

them—the people on our islands promoted the fleet and learned to be excellent sailors and navigators...And, I tell you, this is what our rulers are trying to throttle now and reduce to nothing...”

LUKA: “Write to His Excellency one more time and pray tell him, with no hemming or hawing, Marin, my lord, the following: that there is a people that is begging God for nothing other than the indulgence that unfruitful power be removed from the hands of a group of about twenty monstrous men, who are unarmed, insane, and generally worthless.”

“May God help us.”

FRANO: “I certainly hope that Dubrovnik is well supplied for now and that our fortifications are stronger than those on Rhodes and Malta, which the Turks captured with little problem.”

LUKA: “Where spirits are willing and the populace wealthy, and where people live under a ruler like Count de Medici in Florence, a ruler with abundant wisdom and contentment, there perhaps we could compel the Turks to change their minds and give up forever their plans to visit their vileness upon our city.”

MARIN: “Amen.”

LUKA: “And he will have to agree to accept the emoluments that our City offers him...”

MARIN: “...the City that has never reduced its tribute and that has always done everything in its power to aid their cause, as long as it was not at the cost of damage to its own liberty or to Christendom...”

LUKA: “Our City and our nobles would not dare to attempt, as did the inhabitants of Chios, to provoke the Lion by not fulfilling their obligations.”

MARIN: “And this cannot be done, nor will the situation improve, until the government is changed around, for we have administrators who are mad, but consider themselves wise; they are petty, and worthless, and impotent, and their arrogance can no longer be tolerated.”

FRANO: “When, several years ago, it was rumored that the Turks were dispatching an army to take Dubrovnik, our aristocrats sent no appeals for help to anyone—they merely moaned and groaned and, like timid old women waiting for help to come their

way from the stars, like some kind of miracle, made no effort to improve their situation in the midst of the crisis.”

MARIN: “Other than preparing new copies of the keys to the city so that they could bestow them on the Turks when they got there...”

FRANO: “Well, yes, that sums up the kind of minds and spirits we’ve got in these lords, *Signore* Marin. And such is the manner in which they manage our once glorious fleet that fights now on a daily basis against Ottoman corsairs and can usually hold its own even against one of the great powers.”

LUKA: “Hold its own, or perish—but not without being avenged!”

FRANO: “And the moment they sense the danger is past, and the rumors are false, or sometimes even when they’re true, our nobles start preparing their galleys to flee in the event of renewed danger—to abandon Dubrovnik and find a new abode...”

MARIN: “And they do all of this behind the backs of the people. Then they present the populace with the bill.”

LUKA: “Under this government we are nothing but prey for the Turks, whenever they should decide they want us.”

MARIN: “Nothing would please God more than to remove them from power and create a small new republic serving the interests of everyone.”

LUKA: “Up to now we’ve had government on the Venetian model, but now it should be remade along Tuscan lines.”

MARIN: “And the people want nothing other than for someone who is wise and righteous to command the City’s armed forces, someone who would not be haughty or rash and who would serve as a defender of our national liberty... And for the Council to work the way the one in Genoa works, that is, with half the seats in it for the landowners and half for the commoners, and for the doors of said Council to be open to foreigners...This would only profit our City, which has developed into what it is through the mixing of the most diverse kinds of people who have come from all directions of the compass...In this way Dubrovnik would now thrive even more than ever, for many people from surrounding regions who are wealthy, or who have been abused by the Turks, will fall back into the city...Thus our City will become the safe haven for people from

all across Dalmatia, Albania, and Greece...for all of those who can no longer put up with Venetian cupidity and Ottoman violence... This wouldn't be anything new, after all. Our elders already operated in this manner and managed to expand and enrich their city..."

FRANO: "They are misusing their power, because no one stands up to them..."

MARIN: "When they see how a great power is taking to the field against them, their conceit will subside immediately and it will become obvious that they are as scared as rabbits...and they will learn to consider it a sign of grace to serve in the government, together with commoners...Every issue dividing the people can find a cure through good government, and the fiercest breasts can be tamed when skill is applied."

FRANO: "All of the people will bend their efforts to this great endeavor immediately..."

LUKA: "The people no longer want to live under them. They *cannot* live under them."

MARIN: "In this world, good people do battle with bad ones. The virtuous fight the depraved, the merciful struggle against the lawless, and reason contends with violence...And rational people are obliged to avail themselves of whatever means of support will help them to prevail. Is not the populace of Dubrovnik—oppressed by fifteen weak and useless imbeciles whom they tolerate and obey by longstanding habit—is it not now fearful and mistrustful? We must resist this tyranny! And return security and the liberty we crave from the wanton usurpers to the downtrodden people."

They stroll about the courtyard of the church. Once in a while they encounter an oncoming priest and then fall silent.

MARIN: "I make it known to everyone that I am only here for my amusement. That's so that my sojourn in Rome does not awaken any suspicion back home..."

FRANO: "There are spies from Dubrovnik all over the place."

MARIN: "According to what I've heard, the municipal guard in our city has put new cautionary measures into place."

LUKA: "God help us!"

FRANO: "God and the illustrious Duke of Tuscany!"

De Medici, the duke of Florence and Siena, along with his son, the prince, is riding on horseback through a forest. Behind them, a little distance away, is their retinue. They are returning from a hunt. (This conversation is carried on in Italian.)

PRINCE DE MEDICI: "Today a courier brought me a mysterious letter that I am not sure I fully understand... (*Recites, as if from memory*): 'This matter requires great secrecy and for that reason I can neither make the rounds at court nor involve your esteemed father, His Eminence, the Duke.'"

THE DUKE: "Ah yes, that the *humile forestiero*¹⁹ Dersa or Darsa..."

THE PRINCE: "He's requesting that I intervene with Your Excellency." (*Quotes the letter, a bit sarcastically*): 'I beg and implore you with absolute humility of heart to direct to the ear of your father, the Duke, two or three good words for me and my entire people...'"

THE DUKE (*waving him off*): "That 'humble stranger' is attempting, with our assistance, to overthrow the authorities in Ragusa...(*Laughs*) They say it's a group of twenty monsters that is in charge there—mad and worthless!"

THE PRINCE: "Now I remember him. He was telling me, with great dismay, about the many afflictions of the commonfolk in Dubrovnik."

THE DUKE: "So you know him?"

THE PRINCE: "A poet."

THE DUKE: "A poet?!"

THE PRINCE: "And a writer of comedies."

THE DUKE: "Obviously."

They ride on for a time without speaking.

THE PRINCE: "What do you intend to do?"

THE DUKE: "I think it best if we make no response...And I'll give you one piece of advice. The reports I'm getting from my people there indicate that these 'monsters of Dubrovnik' have been kept informed of all developments and that your hapless comedian is in danger."

¹⁹ "Humble stranger" in Italian.

THE PRINCE: "I should hope so."

THE DUKE (laughing): "But you know I value poets..."

He rides ahead a bit and then returns.

THE DUKE: "This comedy of his might this time very easily turn into tragedy...And the affair could have unpleasant consequences for us...For that reason I advise you to give him a wide berth and send no answer. And may God help him!"

Držić, now a sixty-year old man, walks out of a house in Florence in the evening. He has a hood over his head, like someone trying to avoid detection. He moves through the streets...and reaches his apartment, which is hard by the church.

We notice that he is being trailed by a spy. We catch a glimpse of the spy's face.

Držić gives a conspiratorial glance over his shoulder. The spy ducks.

Držić's humble lodgings. Books, a crucifix.

Držić has fallen forward onto the table, his face planted on the papers there. Next to him: a bottle and a glass. A hand removes both the glass and the bottle.

A modest funeral. A group of ten priests, plus Luka and Frano.

Among those in attendance, as the priests are singing a solemn *Te Deum*, we see the spy who a day or two earlier had been dogging Marin's steps.

In front of the Palace in Dubrovnik, many people have gathered: nobles and servants, priests and paupers.

Old Mavro Vetranović, deeply shaken, is reciting:

The music was interrupted
that used to be famous
and the pride and glory of ladies and *vilas*.
The lutes remained tearful and sad,
the flutes and other reeds played mutely on,
and this baleful bitterness disturbs the violins

so they do not resound sweetly as once they did.
What's more, this great defeat has hurt
horns and cornets, so they lose their sweet sound,
confounded the monochords and clavicembalo,
and confused the harpsichords and the rest of the strings.
Now the music bawls with grief and woe,
the way a black crow caws when it swipes a song.

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NOTE

The language of the dialogues is meant to evoke the authentic language and local color, which deserves to be reproduced here faithfully and consistently.

Matters of chronology and the veracity of historical events, they have been respected.

Even in this text the death of Marin Držić remains mysterious and ambiguous, just as it is in the history of literature.

²⁰ This bibliography was included by Kiš in the manuscript version of this screenplay. I have left the order of the works, and the notes, unaltered, but I have modernized and filled out the citations with publication information, where possible, to make the bibliography more useful. The "Note" that follows is also by Kiš.

KONČAREVCI

("A Factory Story")



SWIMMING POOL OF A SIEMENS FACTORY (black-and-white)

Crystal water shimmers. The afternoon sun, bursting in through large stained-glass windows, reflects off it. Slowly we discover that it is the water of a swimming pool. The bottom and sides of the pool are lined with tiles. Everything is quiet. Evidently it's a holiday. A set of stairs, painted white, for entering the water. All of a sudden a woman's feet appear on them, descending gradually, step by step. The shapely legs of a young woman. Then we become aware of the rest of her: this is a young woman in a bathing suit, one from 1938 or 1939. On her head she's wearing a rubber swim cap. She crouches on the steps, like at the start of the backstroke, and then she propels herself abruptly into the water. She swims slowly on her back. Loud splashing of water. She describes a circle in the pool and returns. We are following her up close. Her blue eyes are open wide. On her face we see an expression of contentment.

All at once, having reached the steps down which she had just come, her eyes pop open and looks to be terrified by something she is witnessing. She shrieks.

Up on the balcony, which juts out over the pool, a young worker is standing. He's leaning on the iron railing. It's a young man of about eighteen years of age, clad in a rather shabby set of coveralls that are filthy with grease. Although frightened, he cannot—not even now that he's discovered—remove his eyes from the swimmer. He observes her as if under a spell. Then he abruptly takes off at a run, going until he reaches a set of locked doors. Then he heads in the opposite direction. Shouts can be heard.

MALE VOICE (*off*): Guard! Guard!...Call the guard!

FEMALE VOICE (*off*): For God's sake, do something!

In his heedless sprint the young man has come down the steps leading from the balcony to the swimming pool. He stops, panting like a frightened animal. Steps can be heard, echoing on the sheet-metal—that's doubtless the guards running up. In front of him is a deck chair at the edge of the pool. In that chair a man is seated. Of him we can only see his hand with a thick cigar that emits curls of smoke. Next to the chaise longue, on a little table, is a bottle of cognac and two glasses. A newspaper in German. And a pair of sunglasses.

In the background, behind the deck chair, we catch a glimpse of the blonde bather, who by now has removed the rubber cap from her head. She comes up out of the water. She tosses back her hair.

BLONDE WOMAN (*in German*): Please get up and save me from this lout!

MAN IN THE DECK CHAIR (*in German*): He thinks he's in the cinema. He's watching Marlene Dietrich swim. (*In Serbo-Croatian, laughing.*) If he even knows who Marlene Dietrich is.

Standing above the man, she watches what is transpiring on the patio around the pool.

BLONDE WOMAN: How did he manage to get up there?

The man freshens his drink. All we can see is his bare, hairy arm.

ONE OF THE GUARDS: Sir, he says he isn't sure how he ended up here...He works on the afternoon shift.

MAN IN THE DECK CHAIR: Oh, please. Remind him. That's right. Remind him.

BLONDE WOMAN (*who understood the director's allusion*): You're crazy! He'll get the water filthy!

MAN IN THE DECK CHAIR (*to the guards who are guiding the young man by the arms*): Help yourself to a bath! (*Points his hand with the cigar towards the pool.*) In you go!

The guards shove the worker into the water. He flounders, choking. The man in the easy chair gets to his feet. He is overweight and sounds asthmatic. Big belly. He's naked to the waist. He has put on the sunglasses. White trousers. A hat made of jute. He watches the young man

thrashing about and doubles over with laughter. The guards are snickering, too. The water around the worker has turned dark with oil. The blonde woman has wrapped herself in a bathrobe. She is staring, goggle-eyed, terrified, at the water as it grows darker and darker.

The water in the swimming pool is going down. There is a film of oily splotches on it. The gurgle of water in the drain is heard and then suddenly the pool is empty.

FADE

(color)

The same swimming pool, seven or eight years later.

On the dirty bottom made of scratched and discolored tiles lie old newspapers (with headlines in German), cases of canned goods, debris of various sorts. The demolished chaise longue with its planks already rotting. An explosion of shattered glass. We can see, from inside, how the stained-glass windows that surround the pool are bursting. Through the smashed window a pick suddenly appears; it's being used to shatter the windows. Then a leg, sporting a worn-out army boot, works its way through the opening. A young man appears in the window, dressed half in civilian clothing and half in military. Further bursting of windows can be heard, as well as the crunching of glass shards under heavy boots. A group of ten young workers, male and female, are making an assault from all directions on the swimming pool. Some of them come from above, from that staircase descending from the balcony to the pool. They are armed with picks, shovels, and spades. The young man who had first appeared in the window raises his pick into the air, holding it in the middle of the handle the way one holds a rifle. He halts at the edge of the pool, at the spot where the peeling, rusting ladder for entering the water is still leaning on the wall. Now all the workers join him at the edge of the pool.

YOUNG MAN WITH A PICK: Down with the last sanctuary of capitalism!

ALL IN UNISON: Hooray!

A GIRL (NADA): Down with the rotten bourgeoisie!

ALL IN UNISON: Hooray!

YOUNG MAN WITH A PICK: Long live Comrade Stalin!

ALL IN UNISON: Three cheers for Stalin!

The young man leaps into the pool, as if deliberately avoiding using the "bourgeois" ladder. He crosses over to the opposite side of the pool and places the head of the pick down on the ground, as if to make his swing more powerful. He pauses for a moment. Then he flails away with all his might at the tiles along the edge of the pool. They crack and fall apart. Everyone lurches into action, with some of them hopping into the pool and others standing outside of it. They bang away at it wholeheartedly. Dust and loud noise.

The young man with the pick bends over and picks up a slimy, oil-stained rubber swimming cap. Everyone ceases work abruptly, looking at the cap. The young man pulls it open and spreads it out. Then he suddenly hurls it into the air with a cry of "Huzzah!" The cap travels in an arc high through the air and lands on the balcony. Bright summer sun and a few clouds. A panoramic view of the factory and the pool. The young men and women look up into the air.

The cap falls onto the floor of the balcony, landing with a smack at the feet of a man standing there.

Panorama of the young workers in and around the swimming pool. Suddenly, they stop moving. The man pushes the rubber cap with his foot. In this man we recognize the worker who was "given a bath." He is some seven or eight years older. He has let his moustache grow. His clothing is also half-military.

MAN FROM THE BALCONY (NIKOLA): Who gave the order to do this, you fuckers?

YOUNG MAN WITH A PICK: Down with the rotten bourgeoisie!

Two or three voices, timidly: Down with the bourgeoisie!

MAN FROM THE BALCONY (NIKOLA): I asked you: who gave the order to wreck the swimming pool?

A WOMAN'S VOICE: Korčagin.

MAN FROM THE BALCONY (NIKOLA): Is that so, Korčagin? Is this "rotten bourgeoisie" stuff from you?

YOUNG MAN WITH A PICK (KORČAGIN): We are building a new Yugoslavia!

MAN FROM THE BALCONY (NIKOLA): And you call this building?

YOUNG MAN WITH A PICK: The bourgeoisie is done for!

MAN FROM THE BALCONY (NIKOLA) (*suppressing his fury*): Comrades, go back to your barracks...And you, Korčagin, do not forget...(*He is now completely bent forward, over the railing.*)

The young men and women quickly leave the area and, lined up in military fashion, begin singing a march. Then they move off.

Their song drowns out the final words of the man on the balcony.

The man on the balcony watches as they leave. He gives the cap a kick, and it falls down onto the edge of the pool.

We hear, through the marching song, only his concluding words:

THE MAN ON THE BALCONY (NIKOLA):...when the waters will once more be clean and blue...Do you get it?

THE FACTORY SWIMMING POOL/YEAR: 1979

Nikola, now an old man, and much heavier. It is a hot summer day. Nikola is standing on that balcony, above the new swimming pool. Below is a renovated, or new, swimming pool, in which the crystal blue water is shimmering once more.

NIKOLA (*off, while an establishing shot of the factory and its pool emerges*):

...It had fallen into disrepair...In that period, we workers were not able to come to the pool. (*Pause. He's been asked a question that was inaudible to us.*) Well, I already told you. The engineers sent me to look for a cable—why, I don't recall exactly... Looking for a quick way back, I started off down some staircase. I opened one door, and then another...All at once I was here. Her name was Marlene Dietrich. (*He grins.*) You better believe she had some nice legs...

Now Nikola is in the water of the pool. He's lying on his belly. He's wearing swim trunks. With one hand he is holding onto a rung of the ladder leading into the water. He's a little put off by the camera. Apparently he is not suited for this role.

NIKOLA: Hey, I wouldn't film it that way...Somebody should mention that I also ended up as director. (*Pause.*) Well, yeah, I liked her. Of course...I was a red-blooded boy, so to speak. Seventeen, eighteen years old. A child of the working class. (*Pause.*) Uh-huh, I moved up through the ranks. Had my certification by '47. I told you the rest.

Now he's sitting in the deck chair.

NIKOLA: I don't know where he is now. He was a bit better-looking than your actor...beefier. And he was just, well, blond-haired... I never saw him again after that...(*Pause.*) We found out that he stuck up flyers all around the factory, calling on the workers to stand up to the leadership...The guys from UDBA¹ came, questioned him...We only discovered later that it was Korčagin. (*Pause.*) Yes, he was a shock-worker, and was decorated many times over. He could wind thirteen rolls in one shift...There were a lot of rejects, but then there was junk and loss everywhere there...(*Pause.*) But I'd toss out that scene with me in the pool... (*Pause.*) And Mate would be in a better position to tell you about that...He came to the factory in those days...Uh-huh. Mate...

THE GUARD-BOOTH IN FRONT OF THE FACTORY

The reception is housed in a barracks out in front of the factory. Above the gate is a sign that says "Rade Končar".² Portraits of Tito and Stalin, decorated with Yugoslav tricolors and party standards. On the door to the guard-booth: the factory clock. The porter, or doorman, is dressed in a threadbare old military uniform, with a smudged army cap on his head. He's seated behind a wooden counter, over which packing paper has been stretched and fastened with thumbtacks.

¹ The secret or political police in socialist Yugoslavia, *Uprava Državne Bezbednosti*, which had earlier (1944–1946) been known as the OZNA (*Odeljenje za Zaštitu Naroda*). These translate, respectively, as the Administration of State Security and the Bureau of National (or: the People's) Protection.

² Rade Končar (1911–1942), a Serbian industrial worker from rural Croatia, became a hero of the Communist resistance during World War II. In the postwar period his name was attached to a number of schools, companies, and factories connected with electrical engineering. In the original title of this play, the word *Končarevci* refers to workers in the well-known main factory bearing Končar's name.

This table holds a field telephone. In the corner a coat rack on which hangs a military greatcoat. A man is rolling tobacco. In front of him is a large volume for keeping the factory's books and accounts. The doorman keeps a pencil behind his ears, under his cap.

The weather outside is overcast. The morning's fog is hanging on around the barracks.

All at once, from out of the mist and haze, a man rolls up on a bicycle. The scraping of the bike chain. The bicycle is old and the chain has not been oiled for a long time.

The doorman quickly abandons his just licked cigarette, which he has not yet managed to light.

He stands up, goes to the door. Unlocks it and then tugs on his army coat to straighten it out beneath his utility belt that holds his revolver.

He salutes in military fashion. (It's not a crisp, stern motion, but one born, we might say, of habit.)

The man has dismounted from the bicycle and is now pushing it in through the gate, towards the entrance to the guard-booth. As if he hasn't noticed the doorman, the new man pushes his bike right into the barracks and leans it against the wall. He takes off his oilskin. He is also wearing a kind of half-military, half-civilian outfit. Under his jacket: the bulge of a revolver.

It's the director, a man of thirty-five or forty, with a moustache like Stalin's.

DIRECTOR (*removing wooden clothespins from the legs of his pants*):

What time is it?

DOORMAN (*pulling a watch from his pocket*): A quarter to six, Comrade Director.

DIRECTOR: But it's not, you Bosnian. It's twenty minutes till six...

I've told you a hundred times: that is the factory clock, the one on the front of this guardhouse, and that's the one that all the others must be set by. Do you understand me?

DOORMAN: But mine here's more accurate.

DIRECTOR: We're not going to have everyone going by his own clock here...This is a factory, not a spa. Remember that, Bosnian!

New workers are arriving. They emerge out of the fog and come in at the gate, soaking wet. The porter makes a check-mark next to their names.

It's obvious he knows the majority of these male and female workers. For the most part they are young people, also dressed half in military clothing, or in uniforms from volunteer labor battalions. Most of the women are peasants, their heads covered by kerchiefs. Some pass by without talking, and some give a greeting: "G'morning!"

DOORMAN (*to one of the workers*): What's your name, Comrade?

WORKER: Ive.

DOORMAN: Hold on, fellow. Last name?

WORKER: Ive Franić.

DOORMAN: You may pass.

Suddenly a song can be heard. The singing gets closer and closer.

*"And on the other siiiiiide,
and on the other siiiiiide,
and on the other siiiiiide,
it's 'Onward, Partisans!'"*

GUARD-HOUSE/INTERIOR SHOT

In the corner of the doorman's booth is a small iron stove. Water in a tin army mess kit is boiling on top of it.

The doorman rises, pours tea into a tin cup, and offers it to the director. Then he returns without delay to his place and continues entering the names of the people who have entered the factory.

The director sips his boiling hot tea.

The director pulls out his pocket-watch, looks at it, and returns it to his pocket.

After a brief interval, during which all we hear is the chugging of the motor of the truck that dropped off the workers, a high woman's voice (off) goes on singing, solo:

*"Just one more word
And just ooooooone more word:
the name STALIN!"*

GUARD-HOUSE/EXTERIOR SHOT

A truck has pulled up. A young man hops out and opens the rear doors. Young men and women (the majority of whom we saw in the earlier scene at the swimming pool) climb down from the bed of the truck and line up in formation in front of the guard-booth. They do this rapidly, by habit. Korčagin is facing their ranks. Out comes the doorman and swings the gates open wide.

The young people go inside in formation, singing (in Russian) a march.

*My country,
beloved country...etc.*

The director appears in front of the gates.

He's singing with them, though they've already moved past.

Then he looks at the clock on the guard-booth and checks his own watch.

DIRECTOR: Bosnian! Lock up!

This sounds peremptory, like a military command.

The porter immediately shuts his big book, jams his cap on his head, and walks rapidly outside. He closes the gate and places a padlock on it.

The director, with this porter behind him, enters the guard-booth. The director puts on his greatcoat. He goes back out in front of the gate.

A boy of about fifteen or sixteen is standing there. He's not a villager—more likely a boy from a working-class district of a city somewhere. Drenched through and through, the boy stands there, leaning on the corner of the gate. He is hunched over.

DIRECTOR: Ah, it's you again.

BOY: Me again.

DIRECTOR: But didn't I tell you already? You're not made for a factory.

BOY: Actually I think I am.

DIRECTOR: Did you give your father the message I told you to deliver?

BOY: I did.

DIRECTOR: And what did he say?

BOY: Nothing...He says you learn a craft from a young age.

DIRECTOR. Hell's bells, boy—this isn't a craft. It's not a trade. It's a factory...Be a good boy now, and go home and tell that to your old man...

All of a sudden he turns away from the boy and takes up position in front of a middle-aged worker who was making for the gate.

DIRECTOR: Halt, comrade! What's your name?

WORKER: Kvržica. Stjepan Kvržica.

DIRECTOR: And what time is it, Stjepan?

WORKER: I reckon it's around six.

DIRECTOR: It is four minutes past six o'clock, comrade. So you just cool it right here, if you don't mind...Here...here...(He keeps shoving him towards the wall of the guard-booth.) so we can wait for the rest of the saboteurs of socialist construction.

He catches sight of a female worker, obviously freshly arrived from the village.

DIRECTOR: And you, comrade, over here! Right here, next to him. Thaaaaaat's right.

He turns to face another man dressed half like a soldier, who is standing off to the side.

DIRECTOR: Comrade, I have already told you. Don't make me call the factory militia...We have no more positions. Is that clear? We need engineers...

WORKER (JOSIP): Comrade, I have my credentials as a skilled worker.

The director grabs the sleeve of another rather young man who was slinking past behind his back. He pushes him towards the others (there are already seven or eight of them) who are leaning against the wall of the barracks.

DIRECTOR: This one's certified, too. A certified malingerer and skilled saboteur of the building of socialism.

JOSIP: I'm an electrician.

DIRECTOR (*interested*): An electrician, you say?...So, where were you during the war?

JOSIP: With the Partisans. Where else?

DIRECTOR: Where else? With the Home Guard, the Ustaše, the Chetniks, Ljotićs fascists, the White Guards—need more?

Now he grabs the sleeve of a woman and without a word leads her over to the people standing dejectedly under the eaves. Then he comes back to Josip.

DIRECTOR: Do you have confirmation of your demobilization?

From an interior pocket he withdraws a worn-out wallet and searches through it.

He unfolds a piece of paper and hands it to the director.

The director glances at this document.

DIRECTOR: Well, why didn't you say something, man? Lieutenant in the National Liberation Army?

JOSIP: Certified electrician.

DIRECTOR (*as if he doesn't believe the other man*): All right, move along. Go to the personnel office. Say: "I was sent by the General Dir—" (*now shouting after him*) And show them your papers!

The director again looks at his watch. Then shifts his gaze again to the watch in front of the guard-booth. Twenty past six.

DIRECTOR (*to the people waiting under the eaves*): And you saboteurs: follow me.

A WORKER: We're not saboteurs. We're the working class.

DIRECTOR: Go on, go on now. You just keep talking, Kvržica. During the war we put your kind in front of a firing squad. And for smaller things than what you've done here.

The director has opened the gate and now admits the workers who arrived late.

DIRECTOR (*entering last*): Bosnian, did you get everyone's name on the roster?

DOORMAN: I did...Here's the list. (*Hands it to him.*)

COURTYARD OF THE FACTORY

Under a large eave, a group of about a hundred male and female workers is standing. Separated from them are the ones (about ten in number) who showed up late and whose names have been entered in that roster.

The list is nailed up on the announcements board. Members of the workers' militia are standing by.

Josip, who has just stepped out of the personnel office, is standing to the side, observing the scene with a look of amazement on his face.

The director reads the names of those who arrived late. They stand there with heads bowed.

The drumming of the rain that has begun to fall in a torrent drowns out the director's words.

Above it all the sound of the factory siren.

**THE "RADE KONČAR" FACTORY—VARIOUS LOCATIONS
(ASSEMBLY LINE, OFFICE, CAFETERIA, GUARD-BOOTH, ETC.)**

MATE (*a man in his 50s. "The boy from the guard-booth."*): That porter passed away five years ago. Or maybe it was six. He started in "Končar" and he finished in "Končar"...(Pause.) There are only a few of us old ones—we were the young ones then—still around... Nikola retired...Beljuk is still here, and Pavleković...Marija Kučan...That would be about it...(Pause.) And I came to see you here at the factory today by streetcar...I'm sitting there in the tram, wondering what the hell I'm doing here...But, you see, I'm still here. (Pause.) The guard-booth was pretty much the way you've depicted it. Maybe even worse. In those days the courtyard had filled up with transformers and casings from all over the country...and now we've become, as you can see, a giant. (Pause.) The director had first entered this plant in a Partisan uniform...And I myself, for example, went through a whole winter with no coat. Once, some woman from the Seventh-Day Adventists roped me into their organization. She said: "If you accept our beliefs, you'll get a coat." I told her at some point that I would worship on Saturdays and not do any work. And she gave me a coat. And the very next Saturday I went right out to the factory's parcel of land in Jasak to feed the hogs.

During this monologue, Mate is actually giving a tour of the factory to the team that had interviewed him. Now they have reached the gates.

Mate seems to recall something.

MATE: And he labeled whoever was late a parasite, a saboteur, I don't know what all. He said: "You are unable to get to work by six, but the Partisans could fight day and night without food or water..." (*Pause.*) Okay. I can't exactly say that that boy looks like I did back then.

He takes out a billfold and holds up a photo.

MATE: I was just...there I am, in the middle...maybe a little skinnier than now...(Pause.) At the guard-booth I always got the same line: "You're not cut out for factory work." Every fifteen days or so. (*Pause.*) But you already know—I've already told you everything about that director. During the Comintern dispute he came to a bad end...I don't know precisely what all went on. He fled over the border. I already talked about that. (*Pause.*) I don't know. Maybe they had shoved too much Stalin down our throats. Stalin said this. Stalin said that...(Pause.) Well, I can say this much: they wanted to get across that border. He and one other guy...(Pause.) I don't remember his name. (*Pause.*) Don't know. I don't think he's still alive.

EXHIBITION ROOMS

A large portrait of Stalin. He's smiling. The camera reveals him gradually, from the moustache, across his eyes, and on to the entire portrait with his decorations and medals. We follow the image from the point of view of an observer in the room.

The admiring saucer-sized eyes of Nada and Korčagin. They are standing side-by-side, nestled together. They are dressed up, as if they are "stepping out" together on their day off.

Nada is holding a catalog for the exhibition. This is a show of Soviet painters and sculptors. A typical example of socialist-realist art. Themes from the lives of workers, caught in emotional poses; sculptures of Lenin and Stalin; workers with picks in their hands and muscles flexed; scenes from the war; scenes from Party congresses presided over by the dominant figure of Josip Vissarionovich.

The workers, who by and large are younger cadres, maintain a solemn

silence as they view the exhibition. Now we can see, besides Nada and Korčagin, all the characters we've encountered thus far, followed by the director, Josip, as well as Nikola. Off to the side stands a middle-aged female usher wearing some kind of uniform.

The director gives a sign for them all to come closer.

A circle forms around him.

DIRECTOR: Comrades, as workers and members of the laboring classes we need to familiarize ourselves with the main currents in Soviet art...Before our comrade guide here explains the artistic and moral value of these paintings and sculptures, I would like to address a few words to you...In a different way from bourgeois painting, which has no interest in coming to terms with workers and their problems, our comrades, these artists and sculptors from the U.S.S.R., take up themes and motifs from working people's lives...

(Our eyes pass along the paintings and sculptures.)

DIRECTOR: ...thereby relegating all previous modes of painting to the midden-heap of history...

EXHIBITION ROOMS/SECTION FOR "BOURGEOIS ART"

A young female worker, Marija (c. eighteen years of age) and a young male worker, Jure, are standing in the half-darkened space where paintings and sculptures representing "bourgeois art" are on display. There are works with the goddesses Fauna, Diana, and Pomona; some with erotic themes; and the occasional example of ecclesiastical pictures: the Virgin nursing the baby Jesus, martyrological works of saints, a Pieta, etc.

The light of the sun enters the room through a small gap in the heavy drapes. Marija is holding the catalog of Soviet painters up to her face, as if to conceal her embarrassment and shame at such an abundance of nude models. She seems in awe of the erotic scenes represented by the works in both media.

The young man (Jure) is no less astonished by their discovery, but he attempts to suppress his embarrassment.

They pass by a marble sculpture (a fleshy, sensuous woman with large breasts) and a bit timidly he lays his palm on one of her marble nipples. The girl is standing next to him. She is disconcerted but smiles. The camera moves towards the large double doors. Through the narrow opening between the two partially closed doors we catch a glimpse of silhouettes of some of the visitors.

DIRECTOR (off): Therefore, comrades, open your eyes and really pay attention. This is going to be a great day in your lives...

The hand of the young man (Jure) is on the blouse of the young woman (Marija), and he is passionately fondling her full, excited breast through the light-colored top.

THE FACTORY'S FARM/AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE/ STABLES

Milking: a hand working the udder of a cow. The loud splatter of the jets of milk into a tin pail. It is half-dark in the stalls. By the manger five or six cows stand tied together. There's one young woman milking each one of them. Among them is Nada.

Jure is currently occupied with the same task. He's at the cow next to Marija's. Outside one can hear hammers striking an anvil.

Marija halts.

She gives Jure a quizzical look, for he does not know how to milk anything.

Then she smiles.

MARIJA (in a deliberate double-entendre): Now, my dear Jure, you have to squeeze it a little harder. Like this...

Marija moves her bucket out of the way and drags her three-legged stool closer to him. She shows him how to milk.

JURE: I'd rather spend my Sundays in the factory than this. I never learned how to milk cows, but I know how to spool up copper.

A GIRL: Aw, look how far you've come down in the world, Jure...

JURE: And yesterday I was feeding the hogs...

NADA: And tomorrow, comrades, if need be—

JURE (*interrupting her*): —we will die, comrade, for our fatherland.

Everybody laughs, including Nada.

**THE FACTORY'S FARM/AGRICULTURAL
COOPERATIVE/OUTSIDE SHOT**

In front of the stalls and stables, in the yard, a group of young workers is repairing a threshing machine.

Korčagin, stripped to the waist, is hammering away at a plow that he is repairing on the anvil.

Nada comes out of the stalls and, beaming with joy as she locks her eyes on Korčagin, offers him a glass of milk.

Korčagin drinks it.

FACTORY/LATE IN THE AFTERNOON

Panorama of the factory, which has fallen silent and is illuminated only by weak lighting. The courtyard with generators.

The camera discovers a window that is lit up. It draws near to that window.

THE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

This office is also located in the barracks. It is only modestly furnished. On the wall: portraits of Tito and Stalin.

The director is standing at the window. He sees a factory militiaman walking around the courtyard with a rifle over his shoulder. Panoramic view of the factory.

A rapping on the door.

DIRECTOR (*without turning around*): Come in.

Nikola enters.

DIRECTOR (*spinning about unexpectedly*): Have a seat.

He picks up a written document.

DIRECTOR: Have a look at this.

Nikola sits down at the table. Takes out a cigarette. The director lights it for him.

NIKOLA: "Strictly Confidential," of course. Everything is marked "Strict. Confid."

DIRECTOR (*impatiently*): Read it, read it...Do you want a little coffee?

NIKOLA: If you can call it coffee...

The director goes over to their hot-plate, pours both of them some coffee into little tin cups.

NIKOLA (*reading*): "With a monthly salary of 70,000 dinars..."
Why, they've lost their marbles!

Picks up his coffee, sips it.

DIRECTOR: Read on...

Sits down on the table near Nikola.

NIKOLA (*bewildered*): ...Good Lord. This, too?...

DIRECTOR: They're sending him to us as part of a program of technical assistance.

NIKOLA (*reading*): "And provisions are to be made for his secure and comfortable lodgings in the Hotel Esplanade...Along with two B-1 ration and supply cards." (*Swallows a gulp of coffee.*)
"During the war, Pancakijević—

He leaves off reading with no warning, as if he cannot believe his eyes.

DIRECTOR: I told you it was good. Read!

NIKOLA (*reading*): "...He worked on the development of the German armaments industry...He is a recipient of the *Ritterkreuz*..."³

³ Knight's Cross

HOTEL ROOM

The opening of a black box lined with red plush. In it: "Ritterkreuz with Golden Oak Leaves."

Josip is holding the box in his hands.

Engineer Pancakijević is standing next to the open hotel armoire built into the wall. He's transferring his things from his suitcase.

He's a man in his 50s, balding, wearing metal-framed glasses. He's short and nondescript, good-natured but melancholy. And an alcoholic.

On the table: a bottle of rakija and two glasses.

Josip is standing next to Pancakijević's bed, not far from the window.

He has picked up the box with the decorations from the nightstand. He is studying them now.

PANCAKIJEVIČ (*with a heavy Russian accent*): I received that for my meritorious work on the advancement of the German armaments industry...

JOSIP: I have confidence in our investigative service and so I'm not going to interrogate you, although there are a few things that I'm not clear on...

Pancakijević comes over to the table, drains his glass again, and returns to the closet.

PANCAKIJEVIČ: You are wondering why I keep that compromising medal.

JOSIP: For example.

The short-sighted Pancakijević draws near to Josip, absent-mindedly holding in his hand a tie that he has still not put away in the wardrobe.

PANCAKIJEVIČ: Have you heard, sir, of repentance?

JOSIP: Call me Josip.

PANCAKIJEVIČ: No doubt you've seen my dossier.

JOSIP: It is my duty to see to your safety and comfort. Although, to tell the truth, I...

Pancakijević finishes his drink. Sits down at the table. Pours himself another one.

PANCAKIJEVIČ: For me, whichever political system was going to

give me greater opportunities to research the mysterious circulation of the still insufficiently investigated subatomic particles...that was a good political system.

JOSIP (*severely*): And the German Reich appeared to you the most favorable for that.

PANCAKIJEVIČ (*downing his drink*): I'm not saying that I was totally blind politically. Not at all.

JOSIP: It's just that your scientific ambitions were stronger than everything else...

PANCAKIJEVIČ (*suddenly despondent*): I decided, sir, to repair what can be repaired...I've been punished by God and by the people...I had turned my soul over to the Devil, like Faust.

Josip is perplexed by this onslaught of repentance and agitation.

JOSIP: I'm not interrogating you.

PANCAKIJEVIČ: I am confessing, good sir...(Drains his rakija.) And that medal reminds me of my duty. It is, sir, my bad conscience.

MAIN HALL OF THE FACTORY

The roar of machines. Spools rotating, generators being assembled, welders showering sparks into the air, etc.

We see the familiar faces of the workers. At one of the spools: Marija. Next to her: Jure. A little farther on: Korčagin. Marija is concentrating hard at her task, which she apparently does not have the hang of yet. Jure walks over to her.

He shows her the right technique.

JURE (*yelling over the din of the machine*): This isn't a spinning wheel, you know.

MARIJA (*also shouting*): What did you say?

Jure leans over and speaks directly into her ear.

MARIJA (*yelling over the din of the machine*): You're crazy!

All of a sudden Jure notices Korčagin, who stops working for a moment to give them a stern look.

Jure retreats and takes up his work again.

At that moment the factory siren goes off. Everyone, save Korčagin, abandons his or her post. As they pass by him, a lot of the workers stop and watch how fast and deftly he works.

Next to him is a multitude of spools, all lined up.

Nada, very proud, tots up his output and enters it into the performance log.

LAVATORY IN THE MEN'S BARRACKS

Washstands are lined up along one wall of the shack. The workers are washing their hands. Some of them are stripped to the waist. The water sputters out of the spigots. Large black bar of soap. Jure stands next to Korčagin.

FIRST WORKER (*handing a foaming piece of soap to a neighbor*):

This isn't soap. It's cheese.

SECOND WORKER: Just don't eat it!

FIRST WORKER: I don't think there's any way it could be worse than what we get in the cafeteria.

JURE: Try it, and you'll find out.

Everyone laughs, with the exception of Korčagin.

Korčagin brusquely takes the bar of soap that Jure is holding out to him.

KORČAGIN: And you, comrade, will have to answer for that!

JURE: For what, then?

KORČAGIN (*severely*): You know perfectly well what for.

JURE: Nope, I don't.

KORČAGIN: Violation of work discipline...You'll find out at the meeting.

JURE: Tell me now so I know.

KORČAGIN: Last night you left the barracks...around midnight.

JURE: What of it?

FIRST WORKER: Let him move to a spot closer to the women's barracks, and he won't have to get up at midnight.

Everybody laughs.

KORČAGIN: Nobody asked you anything, comrade.

FIRST WORKER: Ask or not ask, that's how it is.

Jure rubs his hands with a towel.

JURE: I work as much as I can.

KORČAGIN: It's not about working as much as we can, but about working more than that...Comrade Stalin said: "Cadres take care of everything."

JURE: Let it go. I can't be singing all the time.

Jure tosses away the wet towel.

WOMEN'S BARRACKS/EVENING

The fleshy palm of Marija's hand. She has just washed her underwear in the sink. Now she is wringing them out. Around her head is a towel with which she has tied back her freshly washed hair.

The furnishings in the barracks are extremely spare. One could even say it smacks of poverty. Military-style beds, scuffed-up nightstands next to them, on top of which there are personal items (letters, photographs, apples, flowers stuck into glasses, a book by M. Gorky, etc.).

On the wall: a large poster of "THE ŠAMAC-SARAJEVO RAILWAY LINE".

From the ceiling hangs a light-bulb with a shade.

Marija is wearing a long peasant's nightgown made of linen. She has also thrown a big coat over her shoulders, similar to a military greatcoat.

FIRST WORKER: Come on, girls, cut out those lights.

MARIJA: All right, all right. Just about to!

She wrings out her wash, shakes it out, and looks around for a moment to see where she can hang it up to dry.

SECOND WORKER: What day is it tomorrow?

THIRD WORKER (*sticking her head out from under the blanket*): Saturday...We are going out to the factory's farmstead in Jasak... I've already forgotten what kind of work people do in the village at this time of year...I've been in this factory for two years already.

FIRST WORKER: Turn off that light. (*To Marija.*) For God's sake, you're not gonna get those dry by tomorrow anyway.

Marija walks over to her bed, pulls back the blanket, spreads out the underwear in the middle of the bed and goes back to cut off the light. (Her bed is the one closest to the door.) She lies down in the bed.

NADA (*who is lying in the neighboring bed*): You'll catch a cold doing that.

A VOICE: Enough yakking!

MARIJA (*to Nada, in a whisper*): No, I won't...Don't worry...I learned this from you. Exhausted from their work, the young women fall asleep.

All at once the building is lit up by a flash of lightning. Thunder is heard. Lightning brightens the window. For a moment the light reveals Marija's and Nada's faces. Their eyes are open wide. They are lost in reverie. The door goes flying open and someone flips on the light.

A VOICE: Turn off that switch already!

A woman worker is standing in the doorway. She has on her sleeve an armband indicating that she is the night-duty officer.

DUTY OFFICER: Girls, up you go!...They're looking for volunteers for night work.

A WORKER: And I thought I saw lightning.

DUTY OFFICER: Comrades, the hay in Jasak, on our factory's holdings, has not been gathered. But a storm is brewing...The comrades from the men's barracks have already departed...

MARIJA (*who was the first to jump up*): Let's go!

NADA (*getting to her feet*): Let's go, all of us!

VARIOUS VOICES: Let's go! Let's go!

FACTORY COURTYARD/NIGHT

A truck carrying workers is driving out the gate. The bed of the truck is uncovered. The doorman is standing by, waiting for the truck to pass. A female worker unfurls a banner.

*Lightning flashes across the sky.
The doorman closes the gate.*

THE STORY OF MARIJA KUČAN/VARIOUS LOCATIONS

The film crew that is carrying out the interviews (and that will remain invisible right through to the end of the film) follows Marija's exposition in a workplace setting in the parts department of the factory, in front of the new gates, in a nearby park, etc., as well as in her apartment in a high-rise. During the interview in her apartment, a television was on behind her, with one commercial running after another: for shampoo, lipstick, panty-hose.

Marija is a woman in her fifties, unmarried. Quiet, somewhat disillusioned. Melancholic. She strives to conceal her mood with a certain optimism and feigned good cheer. But the feigned merriment only underscores her resignation.

MARIJA (*after lengthy hesitation*): I think that probably deserves to be thrown out. (*Pause.*) That thing about the underwear made the rounds through the factory, as if I were the only person who even owned a pair. I still don't know how we didn't all get deathly ill back then. But we were young and healthy... (*Pause.*) You see, it doesn't bother me. You shouldn't think that I'm conservative, even though I'm from the village...I find the scene in the art gallery quite good...And it really happened. Only I think we were even skinnier than that and had clothes that were even worse. (*Pause.*) But, yeah, we sang all the time. More Russian songs than anything. (*Pause. At first we are in front of her high-rise, and subsequently inside the apartment.*)

MARIJA: There isn't a lot to be said about me. I'm not really important here. (*Pause.*) I was seven years old when the war broke out. Of the twenty families in our village, fifteen of them took to the forests with the Partisans.

She passed around an album of family photos.

MARIJA: I am part of the cohort of '33...You do the math...

She points to the album.

MARIJA: Yes, that's me...When the war broke out, I was seven. When we came back home, all the buildings were burned down...I started school in 1945. Then I made my way to Zagreb to learn a trade. At that time this factory was just one big building. *(Pause.)* I trained as a coiler. That's the spooling up of motors, you know.

She points out a photo that we also see: Marija standing behind an electric motor, with a scarf on her head. In front of her, competition pen-nants and ribbons.

MARIJA: Back then everything was done by hand. Then we began working according to specifications. *(Pause.)* It was the period of ration cards...vouchers...lines for everything.

She shows off more paragraphs: at a table in the cafeteria, along with Nada; on a work crew; in the truck, etc.

MARIJA: We had our cafeteria. But if you ate your fill of bread one day, there wouldn't be any tomorrow...Yep, that's how it was. We shared the crumbs of our bread.

Now she's showing more pictures in the album: from work brigades.

MARIJA: Those were shock-worker projects, part of the five-year plans...In those days I was still going to night school. And I worked in the factory. *(Pause.)* Working in a factory really is a tough job, especially for a woman. *(Pause.)*

Marija stands up and goes over to the fridge, from which she withdraws two or three bottles of beer, which she then pours out for the team. Then she sits down again.

MARIJA: Nowadays everything is completely different. Workers' Councils, associated labor agreements...Today, how shall I put it, people get paid for staying the full time at meetings. But in our day...

Gives a wave of her hand. Pause (which indicates that someone from the team has posed a question).

MARIJA: But it did happen that I would lodge complaints. Well,

since you've already asked me. (*She is taken aback.*) You see, it is hard for me because they never considered me deserving of the factory's gold badge.

Panorama of the interior of the factory, where people are working at various posts. Marija is positioned high up, in a spot from which the various departments in the factory can be seen.

MARIJA: So I worked here, at each of these stations, over the course of twenty-seven years...But what could my story possibly mean, compared to all this. (*Pause.*) Today everybody craves better and better things...And no matter how much you have, the human heart is never satisfied. That's just how it is.

NIKOLA'S OFFICE

It is late of an evening. Nikola has pushed to the side his stacks of paper, manuals, blueprints, fascicles. In the middle of the table he has spread out a fold of newspaper that serves as his tablecloth. Nikola is eating some yellow cheese and bread. He's drinking coffee from a tin cup; he brewed the coffee on his hot-plate.

There's a knock at the door.

Nikola is startled. He puts down the bread he was holding in his hand and then proceeds to cover up his food with another piece of newspaper. The knocking comes again.

NIKOLA (*with food in his mouth*): Come in.

A gaunt woman with too much make-up enters the room. She is about thirty years old. It is obvious that she's tried to dress up for this meeting, although the clothes she has on are in lamentable condition. She's tipsy. She flinches a bit at Nikola's astonished gaze. She looks over her shoulder.

NIKOLA: Who are you looking for?

The woman looks down at the scrap of paper she's clutching in her hand.

THE WOMAN: Nikola Beljuk.

NIKOLA: That's me.

THE WOMAN: I'd like to speak with you. In private.

NIKOLA (*who gathers that she is inebriated*): How did you get here?

The woman gives a drunken laugh. She looks for a place to sit down. Nikola offers her a chair. He himself sits down on the edge of the table, pushing away the files.

THE WOMAN: The factory director sent me to you...He said this might be of interest to you.

NIKOLA: And what is "this" exactly?

THE WOMAN: It will interest you. Definitely...I know who is swiping copper from your factory.

Nikola stiffens but then makes sure a look of indifference quickly returns to his face.

NIKOLA: Please go on. I'm listening.

THE WOMAN: I have a young child.

NIKOLA: I'm not following you.

Probably in order to demonstrate his feigned indifference, he picks up the newspaper and resumes eating his meager meal. The woman is also doing things for effect. From her shiny but scuffed handbag she removes a tube of lipstick and touches up her appearance.

NIKOLA (*with his mouth full*): I'm listening. You have a young child...

THE WOMAN: Six hundred dinars...It's worth that amount.

NIKOLA: What's your name?

THE WOMAN: It is worth it. The director told me. He said it would be worth that much.

Nikola, with sudden decisiveness, picks up the telephone. He dials.

NIKOLA: Hello. It's me...There's a woman here...(Pause.)

THE WOMAN: I told you so.

NIKOLA: I don't know. She hasn't told me...(Pause.) She's looking to get six hundred dinars for it. (Pause.)

THE WOMAN (*interrupting him*): I didn't tell him that part...I lied to you about that.

Nikola makes a sign for her to be quiet.

NIKOLA (*into the receiver*): Right. Thanks. (*Pause.*)

THE WOMAN: I only spoke with him on the telephone...He has a pleasant voice. (*Smiles drunkenly.*) A real manly voice...

NIKOLA (*obviously bluffing*): So that means...I should show her the door immediately...I understand. Goodbye. Good night...And sorry to have bothered you.

Nikola puts down the receiver. He looks inquisitively at the woman.

THE WOMAN: Please...You are dismissing me without any...

Sits there. Makes no move to leave.

NIKOLA: You heard him. The comrade director says...

THE WOMAN: I heard nothing. I just know you'll be interested in this.

NIKOLA: If you know something about this, then just come out and say it. If you don't know anything, off you go then. And farewell.

THE WOMAN: Six hundred *dinars*. For a factory operation that's a paltry sum.

Nikola stands up, moves over to the window. His back is turned to the women.

NIKOLA: You haven't told me your name.

THE WOMAN: What's it to you? You're not a cop. You only care about who's stealing copper from your factory. And you've been trying to track him down for months...I know who it is. Six hundred *dinars*. A trifle.

She has stood up and now approaches the table. She rustles through her papers. Pulls out a cigarette.

THE WOMAN: May I light up?

She takes out a cigarette and lights it.

THE WOMAN: I have a young child.

NIKOLA (*turning to face her*): The guy who is ripping off the factory—what's he to you? Husband, fiancé, lover?

THE WOMAN: Neighbor. From right next door.

NIKOLA (*suspicious*): Turn him in to the police.

The woman waves him off, like someone who is all too familiar with the police.

THE WOMAN: Never mind them. They demand a lot and end up giving you nothing in return.

NIKOLA (*ironically*): Maybe they'd offer you more. Who knows?

The woman stubs out her cigarette decisively in the tin ashtray. She opens her handbag and places on the table a large copper disk.

THE WOMAN: Feast your eyes on this...Check it yourself.

Nikola picks up the plate, carries it over to the light.

Then he returns it to the table, trying to maintain his nonchalance.

THE WOMAN (*triumphantly*): Well, then?...Surely you won't accuse me of picking this up along the way? D'you think I found it on the path between the front gate and here?...This stuff isn't just lying around in corners.

Nikola again picks up the disk and looks it over.

NIKOLA: I will ask you neither what your name is nor what your connection is to the guy who stole this...but tell me, before we get into any kind of serious conversation, what did that man do to you?

THE WOMAN (*nerves at the breaking point, agitated*): What he did to me? It's more like what he is still doing to me. It's not even a home anymore, but a tavern and a whorehouse...(Grows more and more heated.) Look here, sir, at how my hands are shaking...In the last year I've lost more than ten kilos...

She opens her purse, takes out a photograph.

THE WOMAN: See here? This is how I looked just a year and a half ago. And that was after I'd had a baby.

Nikola takes the photo out of her hand and looks at it impassively. Then he hands it back to her.

THE WOMAN: This was taken—see, it's written on the back—on the 12th of May in Tuškanac in Zagreb.

She puts the photo back into her purse, takes out a handkerchief, and wipes away her tears.

THE WOMAN (*while weeping*): The whole night long they're screaming, with music blaring...They bring in some chicks...And that, sir, that part can totally be heard through the wall. And my kid can't get any sleep there anymore...I've asked him nicely; I've begged him...I hear everything they say. Those drunken bimbos moan like they are suffocating...And there I am alone, you know, with the child.

Pause. She puts her handkerchief away. She abruptly reassumes her business-like tone.

THE WOMAN: Look at it this way: my price is less than ten of these large plates...Think about it.

She stands up resolutely.

THE WOMAN: I'll come back in two days. Be so good as to have the six hundred ready by then. (*Leans over to Nikola's ear.*) Yessir-ree, the bourgeoisie sure can cooperate with the working class. (*Laughs.*)

ABANDONED GARAGE/INTERIOR

An abandoned garage and workshop.

A stripped automobile engine, chassis, bald tires.

This is obviously an old repair shop. It is no longer in use. There are cobwebs in the corners and on the items piled around.

Semi-darkness. Light enters through dusty, cracked windows. The camera is fixed on the eyes of THE MAN who is taking all this in. A beam of light from a flashlight plays on the objects. We hear a clanging sound: it is someone carefully sneaking around among the forlorn car bodies, who then suddenly stops, panting. Whoever it is cautiously tests every further step. But iron objects topple over noisily.

The man suddenly grows still and turns off his flashlight. For a moment all we can hear is his suppressed breathing.

All at once we can hear (or the man in the garage can hear) someone working the lock. A key turns and the door scrapes open. Then weak light suddenly shines forth from a bulb protected by a shade.

We are looking through the eyes of a man who's hidden in the garage, who's just a hooded figure: breathing heavily, he puts onto the table the items made of copper that he pulls out of the lining of his coat. There copper plates and other items.

The man is wearing a cap he has pulled down over his eyes, while he has pulled the collar of his heavy winter coat up. We cannot make out his face at all.

All at once, from the corner five or six meters away, a beam of light comes flooding out of a flashlight. The man covers his face with his arms.

NIKOLA (off): In the name of the law, halt!

Noise can be heard: it's the man quickly tossing the remaining metal objects onto the table. Then, with his back turned to the flashlight, he slowly raises his hands, seemingly pulling his head back even further into his shoulders.

We hear Nikola cocking the pistol.

NIKOLA (off): In the name of the people, you're under arrest!

COPPER THIEF (mumbling, barely intelligible): This is my workshop...I don't get it. A man can't—

We hear Nikola striding forward, banging his way through the scrap tin and iron.

Then: clattering and a falling sound. The beam of light starts flying around the garage. Apparently Nikola has fallen down.

NIKOLA (off): Stop, or I'll shoot!....I'll shoot!

When Nikola gets back to his feet and the light from his flashlight is illuminating the door: we can see only the wind causing the doors to open and shut to the accompaniment of the squeaking of unoiled hinges.

THE COURTYARD OF THE ABANDONED GARAGE/TWILIGHT

The breathing of a thief who is running and crunching snow beneath his feet. We see the exterior of the building through the thief's eyes. We see (he sees) Nikola appear in the door with the revolver in his hand.

NIKOLA (*shouting*): Stop! You motherfucking thief! I'm gonna shoot!

But the man continues running. Nikola shoots into the air. Nikola then runs into the courtyard, which resembles a graveyard for automobiles.

NIKOLA (*in a panic*): I'm going to shoot!

Gunshots. We don't know if Nikola is firing into the air this time. Running, the thief comes to a wall. At the foot of the wall stands the carcass of a car, with all kinds of debris strewn close by. We hear the breathing of the fugitive. Then the clanging of metal. In the half-darkness Nikola can see the fugitive make his way laboriously to the wall on which we spy sagging, rusting barbed wire. Nikola takes aim.

Gunshots.

The "flight risk" falls from the near side of the barrier and lands on the body of the old car.

Nikola runs to him and then bends over the man after removing his cap.

RUNNER: Why have you killed me, you fucking son of bitch?

NIKOLA: It's you, Majstor Ljubo!⁴...You're the one stealing the people's property?

⁴ Since English has no ready, modern equivalent for the Serbo-Croatian word *majstor*, even though it is a cognate to the English *master*. Since this important character is constantly referred to by this nickname, which actually borders on a title or an epithet, I have used it in the translation for the sake of authenticity. A *majstor* is a highly skilled (and usually certified, licensed, and respected) craftsman, mechanic, or technician; it can also denote an outstanding artist or athlete, as in *maestro*.

MAJSTOR LJUBO'S REPAIR SHOP/SOMEWHERE IN GERMANY

A Mercedes is parked above the pit for repairing cars.

MAJSTOR LJUBO (*off*): I have seven workers. All of them our countrymen. One's from Dalmatia. A couple come from Lika. There's another from Zapruđe in Zagreb. There's one from Varaždin. And a Bosnian...All our countrymen. The only German is my secretary. And now she can speak Croatian, too. She's married to one of them. I pay her according to the cost of living here...Everything according to the law, by the book, comrades...And I pay taxes. Everything. I mean, really. Everything strictly by the book...

We finally catch sight of Majstor Ljubo, who is at work on the frame of the Mercedes.

For a moment he stops working and peers at the underside of the car.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: There's always work to do here. You need to work all the time...That's how it is, friends. (*Pause.*) Oh, and I have no time for things like that...That was in the past. (*Pause.*) I kept myself clean, mates, and had no debts to anyone. I paid for what I had...(*Pause.*) And for that reason I got locked up? What am I supposed to say about that?

Pause.

Then he moves quickly to the edge of the pit.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: And if I had taken cold-blooded shots somebody like that, I'd be...(slides his hand across his throat)...shhhhhhh-hhh! And to think that he represented the authorities. He was a member of the Party, a veteran, a manager, a policeman....Everything on this earth...It was as if the factory was his property...It's because of people like him, friends, that I got out of there...

Pause. Three or four of Majstor Ljubo's workers busy themselves around other cars. They look over toward the Majstor and grin. Then they start right back to work, as if fearing his reaction.

By the entrance we see the German secretary. She's sitting at a desk. Behind her there are signs and posters advertising various makes of cars.

They are also hung up all around the workshop.

The secretary is adding up something on the Digitron adding machine. One car is ready to roll out. The owner pays and the secretary gives him his change.

Majstor Ljubo quickly moves over to the edge of the pit, because he has evidently been annoyed by one of the questions.

MAJSTOR LJUBO (*angrily*): Huh, that's not going to happen, friends...But if you're gonna beat it out of me...

He descends beneath the car.

He's in his fifties, powerfully built, his features swollen by drink. He's wearing a pair of workers' coveralls. He has a resolute air about him. Solidity. He wipes his hands on a rag.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: He didn't bother to fire into the air. Not even once...Instead he shot at me. And it's not true that he didn't recognize me. He could've recognized me by my voice. He's lying about it. (*Pause.*) And he's lying about something else—I didn't yell "Why did you call me?" What I said was, "We're not playing cowboys and Indians here, goddamn it!" That's what I yelled.

Majstor Ljubo is now sitting in the same Mercedes under which he was working up until a moment ago. The door of the car is wide open, and he is seated sidewise, with both feet still on the floor outside.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: So, if they are so concerned about humankind, then why do they shoot at workers? That's my question for you...Yes, true enough, I took a few copper plates, but I wasn't stealing from him!...I sold them for cash...But nobody ever asked me: "Majstor Ljubo, what is up with you, that you should want to steal? Nope, nobody ever asked...Not even at the trial. (*Pause.*) I carted off that copper and sold it because my pay was so lousy that I couldn't live on it. (*Pause.*) What do I care about them?...They had enough. So be it....That's the story, friends.

He opens a bottle of beer and drinks.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: But he didn't mention that I had a sick daughter, did he?...I had to pay for that medicine with something,

friends...Back then it had to be imported from America. Penicillin. It was sold under the table. Like gold...Yes, yes, friends, from America...You know what we were getting from Russia? *(Makes an obscene motion with his balled right fist, his right arm bent up at the elbow, and his left hand clapping his bicep in a bras d'honneur.)* That's what. Oh, and brochures.

Pause. Evidently the question frosted him.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: And what of it? I was young and I was into the women...And he just sang his songs about Stalin. And whacked off. All of them were wankers!...Me, I fucked. Worked and fucked!

Drinks a big gulp from the bottle of beer.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: Well, one of them committed suicide in the women's barracks...She left behind a letter. She had grown disillusioned, she said, with Stalin. He wrecked the idea of love for her....That was the story, mates. The *Skojevci*⁵ got all mixed up in politics, sang songs, and took pot-shots at workers. That's how it was...(Pause.) But I have nothing to be ashamed of. I paid my dues, and *basta*. Twenty-one months in prison. Plus the time in the hospital. (Pause.) And what happened to them? The director bolted for Bulgaria or Hungary, or maybe straight to Russia...Nobody mentions that. They don't, and you don't. They even shot more—at the border guards. (Pause.) One of them was killed back then. Or wounded. I don't know anymore...It was ages ago. There was some talk about it...But I don't have any more time for these stories...I have more than enough work to do.

He stands up from the car. Holding the empty beer bottle in his hand, he walks towards another vehicle, stops, and slings the beer bottle into the garbage can. It shatters.

He turns back around abruptly.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: And you dashed all the way to Germany to get a

⁵ *Skojevci* were members of SKOJ, the *Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije* (the communist youth association).

look at a thief? Well, feast your eyes, friends. Feast your eyes. And record it for posterity. Everything is possible. Everything.

He points his hand around the garage.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: It's all right. I understand you. But fuck them. Fuck them, goddamn it. And fuck him—Nikola. You can say that straight to his face...He tried to kill me like a dog! *(Pause.)* Ah, and that was your big upstanding paragon of honor? He screamed at the workers like they were livestock. "Saboteurs, goldbrickers, bourgeois bastards, rednecks, peasants, morons!" And I don't know what all else. You will respect my authority. A big old pistol like this on his belt...He carried everything but a tommy gun...or a machine gun.

He raises the hood of a Mercedes, tinkers. From time to time he turns back around.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: And they never touched a single hair on his head. Not even when he stole all that silverware...Nothing happened to him right up to the time he crossed the border.

Pause. He spins around, slams the hood shut, and sits down on it.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: Baaaah! You mean no one told you that one? All they said to you was that Majstor Ljubo sabotaged the construction of socialism—but nothing about Nikola? Suffice it to say that people said he bolted so he could go kiss Stalin's ass in person. Otherwise, such an honorable man!

Pause. He raises the hood once more and busies himself with the motor.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: Well, ask them. It's like they forgot, you know? *(Pause.)* Well, cutlery is cutlery. It was just silver, but it was gold-plated. Probably enough for fifty guests. For two tables like this. Knives, forks, spoons, and demi-tasse spoons for coffee, and little butter knives, knives just for eating fish, and God knows what all else...This big. In a box like they were medals...A few of the pieces were things he'd acquired himself, but he wanted to round out his collection.

One of the workers brings him a new bottle of beer. Majstor Ljubo opens it and drinks, closing the hood again as he does so. He places the beer bottle on the hood.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: So fine, friends. That's how it was. I don't really know what movies are all about. I see them on television in the evenings...Plus back in the day we used to watch Russian films: the workers are assigned a task, they sweat and toil away, and difficulties arise. At the end, everybody gets a medal.

He laughs.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: I slept more than I watched at those showings.

Pause. He picks up the beer but then freezes. Angry.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: Guys, I'm not afraid of anything. Feel free to check this all out. They all know about the cutlery but they're sitting on it. Somehow it's not compatible with their image of him of him as veteran and factory director and all the other great things he did before he took his little jaunt across the border. *(Pause.)* Yeah, there was an investigation, the guys from UDBA came, or OZNA, or whatever it was at the time. And ultimately the story leaked out.

Pause.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: Well, there's not a lot to say about it. The director from before the war—and before the war, Siemens owned this plant—he had all this tableware...Those folks ate in a special canteen, with items off a menu. And we workers ate downstairs, in our cafeteria. Swill. *(Pause.)* Well, yeah, I know that. They were no better. Worse. *(Pause.)* But let's not start in with the propaganda. Politics, guys, is no concern of mine.

He goes over to a tap and washes his hands. He comes back, rubbing them with a towel.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: The comrades used to lock that cutlery away in the factory safe. You know, they needed it whenever some government minister or a Russian delegation came to visit.

He tosses the used towel past the open door of the car, sits down at a table, and looks over some invoices that the secretary has brought him.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: Then one fine day a couple of engineers come along. Italians, Russians, I can't recall. But it's time to get the cutlery out of the safe. The comrades open it up. Everything's still there, right down to the last *para*, except there's no sign of that gold-plated silverware...So your engineers and their accompanying government minister had to dine with tin spoons, just like us workers in the cafeteria. Then afterwards came the investigation. Who swiped the cutlery? How could it have been the workers? Nonetheless the comrades from UDBA started there. Started questioning us. And me. I fit the bill because I was a recidivist. They asked everyone they could find. What I eat, what I eat out of—and they searched my house.

He goes back to the car. Opens the hood.

MAJSTOR LJUBO: So I said: Comrades, don't forget to nose around a bit in the administration. They're the ones with the keys. I eat from a tin plate with a tin spoon. (*Pause.*) They found the stuff with the general director...but they didn't mess with him one bit. (*Pause.*) He gave it back, of course, but nevertheless... And they didn't touch a hair on his head. Just like with old Nikola, who shot at me...Those were the comrades for you.

He turns to look under the hood. He's fixing the car for real now, and he has no intention of speaking anymore.

COURTROOM OF THE MUNICIPAL MAGISTRATE

Judicial council. In the middle sits the judge, and at his sides the jurors: an older man (a worker all dressed up in a suit and tie) and an older woman, looking very much like a retired teacher.

The council stands.

The judge reads the verdict.

JUDGE: In the name of the people. The council of the third district court has reached a verdict. Comrade Nikola Beljuk—

We see Nikola standing at the place designated for defendants. Next to him is a young lawyer with a briefcase.

In the spectators' gallery we see the director, Korčagin, the doorman, Nada, Marija, and a few individuals unknown to us: idle older citizens who follow court proceedings out of boredom. In addition there are members of the families of both the accused and the accuser (Majstor Ljubo). Majstor Ljubo, all dressed up, stands to the left of the judges' table. Next to him is also a lawyer.

JUDGE (*off, at this point*): —Nikola Beljuk, skilled worker with the highest level of certification in metal-working, is sentenced to a prison term of ten months.

A look of consternation on Nikola's face. The trace of an ironic, self-satisfied smile on the faces of Majstor Ljubo and his lawyer.

JUDGE: Followed by three months' probation...In reaching this verdict, the court bore in mind the behavior of the accused before the court, as well as his irreproachable personal history as a worker, pre-war syndicalist, veteran, and so forth, and also his justified wish to protect the people's property from misuse...He is, however, at fault for having, on his own initiative and without prior arrangement with the organs of state security...

NIKOLA'S APARTMENT

The film crew and walk-ons are finishing up the reconstruction of the trial (the public filing out of the courtroom, people congratulating Majstor Ljubo, etc.).

NIKOLA (*off*): More than anything, I was afraid of that woman on the jury. She reminded me of a mean teacher I once had. (*Laughs.*)

An ashtray full of butts rests on the table in front of Nikola. A thick cloud of cigarette smoke hangs in the room. The whole team is in Niko-

la's apartment. The room is modestly appointed. Nikola had received the team in his bedroom. On the double bed rests a small Italian marionette. Family photographs hang from nails on the walls. A television, turned off, in the corner.

Nikola is sitting in an easy chair, behind a little table with a bottle of cognac and some glasses.

NIKOLA (*after a short silence indicating a question from the crew*):

Yeah, that's the defense he used in court...That he needed the cash to get medicine for his sick little girl.

Pause.

NIKOLA: Yeah, he had a daughter. But she wasn't sick...The girl lived with her mother, while he whored around.

Pause.

NIKOLA: I forked out that six hundred dinars myself. (*Laughs.*)

God knows that was a pretty penny back then...But the next day, in the factory, everybody was looking askance at me. They said: he killed Ljubo on account of a scrap of copper. He came out of it smelling like a martyr, with me as the villain.

Pause.

NIKOLA: I know he's in Germany somewhere. He owns a garage.

He got remarried. (*Laughs.*) That would be his third...He comes back on his summer holidays...Throws his money around in cafés and bars.

Pause.

NIKOLA: But, well, how do I say this to you...Back then—it was like this...

He stands up, walks about the room.

NIKOLA: When a person has worked at the same job for many years, he starts to feel like the factory belongs to him. I spent my life on the grounds of that factory. Right up, you know, right up to my retirement...That's where I worked, that's where

I took my meals, that's where I met my old lady...and that's where I slept a lot of the time.

Pause. Nostalgic.

NIKOLA: Sometimes I still drop by nowadays. In the evening, at the bowling lanes.

He winks roguishly and points somewhere vaguely with his hand, as if the factory were right here.

NIKOLA: When the wife goes out without me. And the children want me out of the house. They say: "'Head on over, Pops, for some bowling...It's good for your heart.'

He halts and takes a seat on the bed. Then he leans back onto a pillow.

NIKOLA: And now that I'm retired, I'll wake up sometimes in the middle of the night with the idea of going to visit all my old haunts at the factory...But my younger boy just says, "Ever since Dad retired, he's been sleepwalking." They make fun of me. "Papa," they say, "that's your bonus for services rendered." That's how they see it.

BOWLING ALLEY IN THE FACTORY RECREATION CENTER

Balls sliding along a gutter.

A hand takes a ball, tests its weight, and then we see Nikola rolling and "guiding" the ball's trajectory by twisting his body.

The sound of toppling pins.

Nikola shakes his head. He is unsatisfied with his score.

He's wearing a warm-up suit. Three or four other workers are bowling with him. Some of them are obviously retirees, men of about Nikola's age.

After rolling again and following it with his eyes, Nikola returns to the crew (whom we cannot see).

NIKOLA: Something did happen here. (Pause.) Yes, cutlery. (Pause.) That's right. 1947, '48...Before the split with the Soviets, for sure.

He returns to the lane, rolls, watches the ball. Then back to the crew.

NIKOLA: If I could put a bit of spin on it...

He pours himself a glass of mineral water and drinks.

NIKOLA: He 'fessed up right away...He says: I took it and carried it home. "Why to your home?" one of them asks. Paripović or Mate, I forget now. (*Pause.*) This, he says, is the class struggle...Up to this point, they've been the ones eating off of silver spoons, but now it's our turn. This, he said, is what we've been fighting for...

He picks up a new ball, lets it fly, and comes back.

NIKOLA: Still, I wouldn't make mention of this, comrades...It will come across as if the factory directors back then did nothing but lift gold-plated cutlery and eat off silver spoons...I wouldn't mention it...There are more important matters here, comrades...Our labor union, for instance, makes arrangements every year with five or six other enterprises for nice workers' vacations...at very reasonable rates...And how they took care, for instance, not to send you off together with the same people you'd been working with for years...

Pause. Returns after rolling again.

NIKOLA: I used to be better at this...I don't practice too much anymore...We also have sports teams for workers. We hold soccer matches. The old guys versus the young ones. The winning team gets a baby lamb...The lamb isn't essential for you all, comrades, but the game—

Pause. (A question that is inaudible to us.)

NIKOLA: What happened, happened...That wasn't the only time he crossed the border...He also left earlier, during the Cominform crisis.

BORDER CROSSING/DAWN

By an abandoned swing-gate on the Yugoslav side of a border-crossing there are armed soldiers with German shepherds on leashes. An OZNA officer looks down the road to where he spots, in the early morning light, an approaching truck.

A TRUCK'S CAB

Josip is sitting at the wheel. The director is next to him. Through the windshield the border station and boom gate can be seen, getting ever closer.

DIRECTOR (off): You—you talk as little as possible...

Josip nods his head. Worry shows on his face. They drive on for a while without talking. Through the windshield we now see a soldier raising his hand and giving them the signal to halt. The truck stops. Agents of OZNA, severe and mistrustful. An OZNA officer checks Josip's and the director's documents. They are standing fairly close to the vehicle. A soldier with a machine gun and a dog is right by them. A soldier, who is checking beneath the tarp on the back of the truck, approaches the officer and salutes. The officer, not letting their identity papers out of his grasp, proceeds to the truck together with all the rest of them. The officer peers under the tarp and then turns to face Josip.

OFFICER (harshly): Do you have a list of the items you're carrying?

DIRECTOR: We gave that to you, comrade.

OFFICER (looking at the list): How many kilos of cargo?

DIRECTOR: We didn't have it weighed.

OFFICER: I arrest you in the name of the law.

DIRECTOR (changing his tone, now more severe): We aren't smugglers. You can't arrest us.

CAPTAIN (to the soldiers): Take them away.

Josip moves towards the captain. He holds out a piece of paper to him. The captain runs his eyes across it, quickly, and then regains his composure.

CAPTAIN: Then it's in order, comrade...But I cannot let you pass.

JOSIP: Allow me to make a phone call.

CAPTAIN: If you get through to the minister himself, I still can't let you through. Orders are orders.

Josip places a call from the border station. He shouts into the receiver, after which he gives it over to the captain, who's been standing next to him the entire time.

The captain takes the receiver.

During this scene we've been listening to Nikola's commentary, punctuated by sounds of rolling balls and toppling pins.

NIKOLA (off): To Austria they transported bacon and prosciutto. Sometimes copper, too, camouflaged as axles.

The officer hands the men back their documents.

The truck moves past the raised boom gate, towards Austria.

A PUB SOMEWHERE IN AUSTRIA/DAY/INTERIOR

Josip and the director are sitting at a table in the corner of a typical Austrian restaurant. They are conversing with a man in civilian clothes. The man is wearing a Tyrolean hat with a feather, badges, and pins. Large glasses of beer stand in front of them.

The man hands them a rolled-up piece of paper.

A heavy-set waitress carries their glasses away and brings new ones.

The man in the Tyrolean hat laughs contentedly. There's a window at his seat, and he pushes open the curtain slightly, so the courtyard of the building is visible.

Two young men in riding-breeches are unloading prosciutto from the truck. Laughing, they carry it towards a van parked close by.

The man in the Tyrolean hat gets to his feet and shakes hands with Josip and the director.

NIKOLA (*off*): Those guys crossed the border several times...They exchanged things with former Siemens engineers for plans for combined mechanisms like motors and generators...But, no, I don't think that would be an appropriate part to show...How would you explain it? A veteran, a conscientious worker, someone who gave everything he had for our cause, and then all of a sudden—a traitor? I don't understand it. The abrupt about-face...

BORDER CROSSING/NIGHT

(A variation of the scene before last.)

Headlights approach. In their light we spot the building of the border station and the boom gate, growing ever closer.

Josip is behind the wheel. Next to him is the director.

DIRECTOR (*to Josip*): You talk as little as possible...And you know the rest.

Josip, a worried look on his face, nods his head.

We see a soldier armed with an automatic weapon. He's got a German shepherd on a chain.

With his flashlight the soldier signals for them to stop.

The truck starts to brake. The soldier moves towards it, and, when he is quite close, the truck accelerates rapidly.

Josip's tense face.

The truck races towards the lowered boom gate.

Gunfire. The truck slams into the watchtower beside the crossing arm.

Crash. Uproar. The running of soldiers.

The roar of the motor, still running.

COURTYARD OF THE FACTORY/EVENING

Panorama view of the poorly lighted factory courtyard. The roaring of a motor is still audible. The camera locates the source of the noise: the racing motor grows louder and changes pitch as we approach an illuminated window in the barracks. Music seeps out of it.

WORKSHOP IN THE FACTORY/EVENING

The music reaches a crescendo.

A fantastic-looking apparatus is spinning around. Gears, transmitters, propellers, small electric motors, amperimeters, electrical coils, etc. This entire whimsical construction is dominated by a huge flywheel.

Standing atop some improvised scaffolding made of boards and iron pipes (the scaffold is in the shape of a square around the apparatus), Nikola leans over the machine, pulling down the occasional lever and pressing buttons on the "control panel."

The flywheel rotates at high velocity, accompanied by the muffled din of the rotor.

Then the racket ceases all of a sudden: Nikola has cut the motor. Now all that can be heard is the hissing of the swinging flywheel, which gradually slows down and comes to a complete stop.

Nikola wipes his hands on a rag, descends from the scaffolding, peers under the "machine," and tightens up something with a monkey wrench. He's covered in sweat.

Mate stands in the doorway. (He is at this point a young man of eighteen or twenty years of age.)

Nikola, caught up in his work, and deafened by noise, does not see him come in.

Mate watches, fascinated, as the flywheel continues to rotate.

MATE (*when the flywheel is finally stationary*): What's going on, Majstor Nikola? It won't work, eh?

NIKOLA (*after a brief interval, and without turning to see him*): It will, it will—why wouldn't it?...Didn't you see it earlier?

MATE (*taken aback*): Yeah, I saw it...It stopped.

Nikola draws himself up angrily to his full height and turns towards Mate.

NIKOLA: It stopped because you came in!

He threatens the young man with the monkey wrench.

Mate descends a step or two on the ladder where he is standing.

MATE: Majstor Nikola...It's not going to work that way.

NIKOLA: Didn't I tell you not to darken the door to this room?...

Scram! (*Threatens him.*) Like you know if it will or won't—

MATE: But that's what the engineers say!

Nikola stands up again and comes over to the edge of the scaffolding.

NIKOLA: Listen up, kid...If Pancakijevič himself told me that, I wouldn't care...D'you hear? Our country needs innovators and inventors nowadays, not goldbrickers...(Tinkers around with the machine.) Ach, if I only had access to a few parts. Then you'd see...

He continues working on the machine and then stands up.

NIKOLA: They think they know everything because they had schooling...But, I tell you, this will advance the electrification of the countryside...It's just that I need to get my hands on some stronger magnets...You'll see...And so will they—

MATE (from the door): Majstor Nikola, do you know the name for this type of machine?

NIKOLA: I told you to beat it!

MATE (holding the door handle): *Perpetuum mobile.*

Nikola recoils as if he'd scalded his hand. He stands up fast and bangs his head on the machine.

NIKOLA: Fuck your *perpetuum mobile* and fuck your science. (Rubs his head.) Did you hear me? I said fuck it!

Without missing a beat he hurls the monkey-wrench at Mate. Mate, though, has already taken cover, and the wrench hits the wood of the door.

FACTORY COURTYARD/EVENING

Mate slams the outside door and sets off at a trot across the poorly lit courtyard.

NIKOLA (off): You're gonna school me about that *perpetuum mobile*, are you? Snotty little brat!

DEPARTMENT FOR THE ASSEMBLY OF LARGE TRANSFORMERS/DAY

As workers are assembling large transformers (the dimensions of which, along with the procedures in use and even the hall where these operations are taking place are in stark contrast to the foregoing sequence), Mate, now an engineer overseeing production, stands on a high cat-walk above the transformers.

MATE (*laughing*): That's not exactly how it was, but never mind...
He wasn't aiming at me with that wrench...Sure, he was angry.
And he was cursing...He couldn't stand me calling the machine
a *perpetuum mobile*.

Now Mate is standing in his office, pointing at a chart of production figures.

MATE: In that period we did truly have need of innovators and inventors...He worked on into the night, beyond factory hours...And then the socialist bloc suspended technical assistance to us—

Mate is seated at a table in the planning department.

MATE: It was—well, how do I put this—part and parcel of that spitefulness that we all felt...You gotta know that such impulses are way stronger than political ones. Only later does a person recognize the political value of such a thing. It was, I tell you, more than anything a question of spite: “We can do this, too, and we can do it by ourselves!”...A kind of *dešpeta*, or spite, as the Dalmatians say.

Pause.

MATE: Sure, after a long spell of experimentation, he gave up. (*Laughs.*) But I don't know if he was ever really dissuaded. (*Pause.*) He didn't ever like hearing it mentioned after that... Especially after the start-up of operations of the Maribor Island transformers. I worked on that one a lot myself.

Mate hands around an album with photos from Maribor: the generator, the start-up, etc. We look through them.

MATE (*off*): I mean, it's possible that he stopped earlier...I don't recall exactly. At any rate it was sometime before the Maribor Island thing...Actually, he had started back when those transformers came in from Czechoslovakia. Yes, yes, that was a severe blow to us...Especially for our factory.

FACTORY YARD/DAY

A mass meeting in the courtyard of the factory.

All of the workers are assembled.

It's a spring day. The workers are holding up banners and signs:

LONG LIVE THE UNSHAKEABLE BROTHERHOOD AND UNITY OF THE USSR AND YUGOSLAVIA; TITO-PARTY; etc.

A podium has been set up near one of the barracks. Above the podium: portraits of Tito, Stalin, and Minister Grčić (who will be making an appearance at this meeting).

The tricolor, Party banners, flowers.

Minister Grčić is a man in his fifties. Suit, tie, windbreaker.

MINISTER GRČIĆ (*speaking into the microphone with pathos*): ...of our construction of socialism.

Applause.

FIRST WORKER: Long live the unshakeable friendship between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia!

ALL: Hurrah!

SECOND WORKER: Long live the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and its leader, Comrade Tito!

ALL: Hurrah!

The minister signals for them to stop, so that he can continue his speech.

A FEMALE WORKER (NADA): Long live Comrade Staliin!

ALL: Hurrah!

MINISTER GRČIĆ: Comrades...An imperialist conspiracy and the hegemonic designs of the capitalist countries, who defend democracy with words but by their deeds show themselves to

be warmongers, are attempting to sow discord and incite their peoples against the Soviet Union and the people's democracies...

A MALE WORKER (KORČAGIN): Down with imperialism!

ALL: Boooo!

A FEMALE WORKER (NADA): Long live the Red Army!

ALL: Hoooooray!

MINISTER GRČIĆ: Consequently, comrades, we must commit all of our knowledge and skill to the fight for an enduring peace and genuine democracy, fighting tirelessly against the forces of reaction—

A WORKER: Down with the forces of reaction!

ALL: Boooo!

MINISTER GRČIĆ (*again giving a sign for them to stop*): —against the forces of reaction and its hirelings, and for the interests of our Federative Yugoslavia and the countries of the socialist bloc, led by the Soviet Union—

A WORKER: Long live the wise leadership of the Soviet Union and its chief guide, Comrade Staliiiiiin!

ALL: Hoooooray!

MINISTER GRČIĆ: —all of whom are offering us their unstinting assistance in rebuilding our devastated homeland.

A FEMALE WORKER (MARIJA): Long live the Five-year Plan!

ALL: Hoooooray!

MINISTER GRČIĆ: Comrades—

A WORKER: Long live the shock brigades!

ALL: Hoooooray!

MINISTER GRČIĆ (*urging them to stop*): —Comrades...Thanks to the unselfish assistance of the fraternal socialist countries and the comrade engineers from the USSR, who will bring their one-of-a-kind experience to our operations...

Two or three Soviet engineers in the first row, smiling.

A WORKER: Long live the Soviet engineers!

ALL: Hoooooray!

MINISTER GRČIĆ: This factory will soon have the capacity to produce generators like those at Dnieprostroj—

A WORKER (*chanting*): Ti-to, Sta-lin, Ti-to, Sta-lin!

The chant is taken up by everyone in the audience, along with those standing on the bleachers and the smiling Soviet engineers.

A spring downpour erupts. The director opens an umbrella and holds it above the head of Minister Grčić.

The workers pull their coats up over their heads.

The chanting ends in applause. Everybody is clapping.

MINISTER GRČIĆ: Comrades...the transformers that we have received from socialist Czechoslovakia—

A WORKER: Long live brotherhood and unity between the laboring classes of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia!

ALL: Hoooooray!

MINISTER GRČIĆ: —are but one part of the assistance that fraternal socialist lands are offering to us—

A FEMALE WORKER: Long live the fraternal socialist lands!

MINISTER GRČIĆ: —as we restore and renew our homeland, the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia...Long live the FNRJ!⁶

ALL: Hoooooray!

MINISTER GRČIĆ: Long live fraternal Czechoslovakia!

ALL: Hoooooray!

MINISTER GRČIĆ: Long live fraternal Soviet youth, the champion of peace and freedom!

ALL: Hoooooray!

MINISTER GRČIĆ: Long live the Communist Party of Yugoslavia!

ALL: Hoooooray!

Applause.

The minister descends from the podium. The director continues to hold the umbrella above his head.

Rain keeps drumming down.

They walk under the eaves of a building.

⁶ The FNRJ was the *Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija*. This Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia was the first name for Tito's (new, postwar, socialist) Yugoslavia, and it was used from 1945-1963. From that point forward, until its breakup in 1991, the country was known as the SFRJ (*Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija*), or Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The eaves are built of fresh lumber (it is a kind of improvised factory hall), lined with tar paper. The roof is supported by tall metal columns and wooden rafters.

THE EAVES OF THE HALL/DAY

Sitting squarely under the eaves is a generator that has just been unpacked. To one side sit two or three other generators, still in their packaging of boards. In bold letters they bear the stamps ČSSR (in Latin characters) and CZECHOSLOVAKIA (in Cyrillic characters): the country of origin of these goods.

MINISTER GRČIĆ has walked under the eaves with the people from the podium, and the Russian engineers as well.

Outside the rain is drumming on the tar paper.

Workers, carrying signs on which the rain is causing the ink to run, crowd around.

The director shows the minister how to start the motor.

The minister starts it up. The machine begins to hum.

Everyone claps.

Suddenly squeaking, then sparks, as if lightning had struck the machine.

Everybody jumps back.

A few workers bolt.

The flabbergasted face of Minister Grčić and the director.

AN AUTUMN DAY/THE BANKS OF THE SAVA RIVER

Nikola with a fishing pole in his hand. He's wearing rubber boots and a poncho.

He throws out the hook, watching the bobbing of his float.

In the background a boat is moving past.

NIKOLA: Yeah, I was scared...I thought that a thunderbolt had struck the generator. Light flashed from it, and some folks started to make themselves scarce. *(Pause.)* Minister Grčić was standing there as if bolted to the floor...I'll bet he was mortified, but he didn't flee. Government ministers can be men, too...

He turns to field another question, although we cannot hear it.

NIKOLA: He just stood there with the folded-up umbrella. *(Pause.)*

It was all discussed at that time at meetings of the Party. And with comrades from UDBA. *(Pause.)* Well, the generators had iron filings in them...Sabotage...*(Pause.)* Director Ležnjak never wanted to face up to this fact...He would say: it could be sabotage, I'll grant you that. But the Czechs could never have done this. Nor could it have been one of us. He'd say, we have our own domestic traitors, and enemies, a few, but here we go hunting for them among fraternal nations. He stated that it was the work of international forces of reaction...*(Nikola grins.)* So why, comrades, he'd say, are we looking for saboteurs in the ranks of fraternal nations and their working classes, as if we didn't have enough of them here at home...He absolutely did not want to face this—although he saw it with his own eyes.

Nikola pulls back his line, replaces the bait on the hook.

NIKOLA: They're biting. They're nibbling at it, anyway. But just little ones...*(Pause.)* He didn't want to admit it even when we put together a commission and, together with the comrades from the UDBA, inspected the other machines and pulled iron filings out of the ball bearings...This can't be, he said...No, no, no! There are others who are responsible for this...a defeated class...It cannot be, he repeated...That became his favorite phrase, like a proverb.

The slapping of oars is audible. The splashing of water. Nikola is sitting in a boat.

He has just pulled a fish from the water and now, bending over the floor of the boat, he's removing it from the hook.

NIKOLA *(off)*: Who told you that?...It nibbled at it, but it doesn't even weight fifty decagrams. *(Puts new bait on the hook.)*...It was definitely Mate. Or Paripović...Well, yeah, I was *(angrily casts the hook a great distance)* an inventor. An innovator. I do have, comrades, a few of my own patents that are now part of our generators. It's not any kind of *perpetuum mobile*, because

they made all that up. All that was (*he grins*)...You know...an experiment...Man, if I had just had access to some more powerful magnets.

He abruptly bites his tongue.

NIKOLA: In those days we didn't have cadres, trained personnel...

OK, there were some Italians. They came after the Russians. We thought they were worth their weight in gold. They turned a few screws, fussed about, and when we turned up the heat on them they scarpered...They were charlatans and swindlers... (*Pause.*) Then we said: Fuck you and the horses you rode in on! That's how it was, I tell you...

Pause.

NIKOLA: Ah, well, I don't know exactly...I can't recall anymore...

Yes, he did get arrested. Right after the Cominform thing... Not even fifteen days after he made that speech to us.

THE OFFICE OF THE NEW DIRECTOR

It's the same office that we saw earlier. Everything in it is more or less the same, except that Stalin's portrait has been removed. The outline of the frame is quite visible on the dust and dirt of the wall.

There's a portrait of Tito on the wall still, and a new slogan: LONG LIVE THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN.

The office is crowded with people. Cigarette smoke. Perspiring, anxious faces of people, some of whom are seated and some of whom are standing. In the office are, along with the new director (he is a man of thirty to thirty-five years of age), the new managers as well as Nikola and Jure. Also a representative from the factory police detail.

The phone on the director's desk rings.

Everyone jumps. The director picks up the receiver.

DIRECTOR: It's me, Comrade Minister...

Everyone looks the director's way, straining their ears, curious.

DIRECTOR: But—

We can hear indistinct shouting through the receiver. The director signals to those present to quiet down, because they have started muttering: "Tell him it isn't possible"... "We said our piece," etc.

DIRECTOR (trying to get a word in edgewise): Still, Comrade Minister...(Pause.) But we need them...(Yells.) WE-DO-NEED-THEM!...FOR-THE-SHIPMENT-OF-OUR-MAN-U-FAC-TURES!

ONE OF THOSE PRESENT: Tell him that that's our unanimous decision.

The director covers the receiver with his hand and motions for them to be quiet.

From the other side comes more indecipherable shouting.

DIRECTOR: This is our joint decision. (Pause.) We will take our complaint to the highest levels...

ONE OF THOSE PRESENT: And to Marshal Tito's office...

Shouting from the receiver.

DIRECTOR: Then you will have to arrest all of us...I tell you, you will. You'll have to arrest us all...The entire administration of the plant. (Pause.) Comrade Minister, I was not making a threat. (Pause.) That wasn't a threat at all.

Shouting from the receiver, after which comes a "click": the government minister has hung up.

DIRECTOR (replacing the receiver, worried): He claims he'll be sending over the UDBA to take us all into custody.

OLD GUARD-BOOTH/AROUND NOON

It's a hot summer midday.

Inside the booth itself there's nobody. The windows are covered in newspaper.

The camera draws nearer and nearer to the newspapers until the head-

line is legible: COMINFORM MEETS FOR CONSULTATIONS IN HUNGARY.

The printed headlines remain long enough for us to read it.

The only accompaniment is the splashing of the oars and the sound of water lapping the flanks of the boat.

NIKOLA (off): Around noon Minister Grčić himself showed up to arrest us...He demanded of the new director—and that was Čulak, the engineer, if I remember correctly—

Moving from the locked windows of the guard-booth and the newspaper print, the camera pans over the neglected, shuttered gate area.

Policemen from the Interior Ministry are standing in front of the gate, ten of them, equipped with helmets and rifles.

On the courtyard side stands a large crowd of workers, with the factory policemen in the first rows.

Anticipation. Tense, stern faces.

NIKOLA: They were negotiating over the phone with everyone imaginable. The Minister kept insisting that the trucks be turned over, whatever the cost to us. But Director Čulak stuck to his guns..."Tell him they're needed for our shipments"...In those days trucks were scarce. Everybody was hunting for them for himself. (Pause.) The minister wanted us to give them to him for the transport of wood products from Banja Luka, where...

A member of the factory police unit runs over to the gate and opens it.

NIKOLA (off): We feared the worst-case scenario. We had barricaded ourselves in. Inside were only the minister and his entourage...Then, some time around noon, the events reached their climax...

A jeep pulls into the factory grounds. Two UDBA agents are sitting in it. The jeep kicks up the dust in the courtyard. It makes for the administration building at high speed.

NIKOLA (off): It had turned out that Minister Grčić was a saboteur...

Accompanied by the pair of secret police agents, the Minister emerges from the administration building with handcuffs on his wrists. The jacket of his suit was draped over his shoulders. They all took their places in the jeep and disappeared through the gate.

NIKOLA (*off, for the duration of this sequence*): I wouldn't film that part if I were you...How are you going to explain it to folks? A minister, a Party member from before the war, and yet a saboteur...These, comrades, are very unpleasant issues...And, you see, there were happier events...triumphs and successes in our work life...

THE FACTORY CAFETERIA

Male and female workers clapping.

In the first row: the director (the old one), Stjepan, as well as some new faces: union representatives and government officials.

An enormous banner at the front of the cafeteria: WITH REDOUBLED COMPETITION IN THE WORKPLACE WE EAGERLY AWAIT MAY DAY, THE HOLIDAY OF THE WORKING PEOPLE.

And above the serving line, the slogan:

WITH THE CULTIVATION OF POTATOES OUR COLLECTIVE HAS SCORED ANOTHER VICTORY FOR LABOR

On the other side of the banners (off):

UNION REPRESENTATIVE: ...and for the best individual in the transformer department, Comrade Mate Vukelić...

Applause in the hall.

UNION REPRESENTATIVE: ...who logged five hundred sixteen working days, and for his prize receives (*trying to make himself heard over the applause*)—for his prize receives a set of work clothes.

The union rep stops reading for a moment.

A woman worker, dressed in work clothes, bestows upon Mate his new

*work outfit. Mate, wreathed in smiles, kisses her on both cheeks and then turns to his neighbor, Korčagin, who is also grinning with satisfaction. Korčagin is holding a large radio in his hands. He received it as a gift for successfully fulfilling work goals...He hardly manages to balance the radio on his arm, to shake hands with Mate.
To Mate's right stands Marija.*

UNION REPRESENTATIVE (*reading*): Marija Kučan, who logged four hundred eighteen working days and as an award will receive...will receive a pair of workboots.

*Applause in the hall. The union rep is clapping too.
A girl in work gear hands Marija the boots. Marija kisses everyone on the cheek.*

UNION REPRESENTATIVE (*reading*): "...while the best results in the fulfillment of norms was achieved by the three-time champions, the shock brigade from the transformer department."

Applause. Cries of "Hurrah!"

UNION REPRESENTATIVE: "—headed by Comrade Nikola Jurač... and he receives as a gift—"

*The union rep tries to calm down the unruly hall. Everyone is laughing and clapping.
A male worker has a bag pressed into his arms—from which can be heard the squealing of a piglet.
Now the applause in the room is even greater, and pandemonium breaks out. Everyone is laughing.*

UNION REPRESENTATIVE (*succeeds in prevailing over the shouting*): ...and he receives the gift of a piglet.

*Nikola accepts the sack containing the pig from the other worker's hands. The union rep extends his hand to congratulate him.
Nikola shakes hands.
The piglet squirms out of the bag and begins scurrying about the podium. Then it leaps down into the audience and continues scurrying through the rows of chairs.*

Nikola lurches into action, following the piglet at a trot. Everyone is laughing and joins in the chase.

Behind the counter where food is dished out, two or three heavysset servers and the cook are contorted with laughter, flashing their silver teeth.

The squealing of the piglet grows louder and louder.

The squealing blends into the sounds of Beethoven's Eroica.

THE FACTORY CAFETERIA/EVENING

The same cafeteria, late in the evening.

The counter of the serving line. Over the counter we see huge stoves, tin pots and pans, cauldrons. The white tile of the kitchen.

Beethoven's Eroica is here, too.

Upon the jury-rigged podium, which has been built upon a base of cafeteria tables (as in the previous sequence), sits the orchestra of the Philharmonic.

The conductor swings his arms at full tilt. He is an older man with a prominent crown of white hair around his shiny white head.

The musicians are caught up in their playing, bent over their instruments.

A view of the audience follows. In the first row: the director, Josip, Pancakijević, all on the right-hand side. On the left: the men and women workers who were recognized earlier today.

Behind them, rows of workers. A fairly large number of empty seats.

Everyone is tired, sleep-deprived. Some have dozed off. Others' heads are nodding from exhaustion, even as they make valiant efforts to hold them up.

The workers' rubber boots.

Bent, muddy, and scuffed up shoes and slippers underneath the wooden chairs.

Pancakijević is the only person listening enthusiastically to the music. His head bobs to the rhythm of the music. Sometimes his hands also give vent to his exuberance.

Looking across the serving counter we see the servers and the fat cook. The cook, hidden from view by the large stove and pots, has fallen asleep on a stool, her legs immodestly spread apart.

The two servers have leaned their heads on their hands at the edge of the counter and are napping. Their heads dip and occasionally drop altogether, as if they were fatigued passengers in a train.

The orchestra. The musicians leaning into their instruments. The conductor in full swing...

The final chords. The conductor takes a bow.

Applause from those who are still awake. The director and the manager direct their applause from the first bench to the orchestra and then, upon sensing the silence behind them, they turn around to face the workers and, as if this were one of their political meetings, spur them on with applause. Jostling and nudging.

The drowsy cook freshly roused from her sleep, applauds, although her eyes are still closed.

The last musicians are packing up their instruments and quitting the podium.

The hall is empty, with only the cook—asleep—still at her place.

Engineer Pancakijevič is still seated. He is ecstatic, daydreaming.

LARGE HYDROELECTRIC STATION/DAY

A panorama of the large hydroelectric facilities.

A formal ceremony marking the bringing of the facility on line. Flags. Banners. Music. Flowers.

Slogans:

ONWARD WITH TITO TO NEW TRIUMPHS—MARIBOR ISLAND, THE PRIDE AND JOY OF OUR INDUSTRY—LONG LIVE THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN—ELECTRIFICATION OF THE COUNTRYSIDE, OUR FUNDAMENTAL TASK—LONG LIVE THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF YUGOSLAVIA—etc.

The director and Korčagin are no longer to be found among the ranks of the workers.

At a podium with a microphone is a government minister (but not the one we saw earlier).

GOVERNMENT MINISTER: ...among those factories, comrades, was also yours...Czechoslovakia has canceled the delivery of

transformers and sheet metal for dynamos, and Hungary has reneged on sending joint-sealing material, and then after that infamous resolution—

MALE WORKER: Down with the Comintern's lies!

ALL: Boooooo!

MINISTER: —after their infamous resolution, those parts reached us “touched up” according to the Cominform recipe.

MALE WORKER: Long live the Communist Party of Yugoslavia!

ALL: Hoooooray!

MINISTER: According to the Cominform recipe, and that means with iron filings in the most sensitive areas, with old and grease-stained components, and so on and so forth...

MALE WORKER: Long live the Central Committee!

ALL: Hoooooray!

MINISTER: Comrades...Our working people have not been taught to surrender in the face of difficulties, even when they are as grave as these.

GENERATOR DEPARTMENT

*The enormous screw of a generator, deep below the earth.
Here no one can hear the words of the minister, nor the other noise from outside. Only the echo of voices and resounding footsteps.
Around the generator: five or six engineers plus Nikola.
Everyone looks worried, nervous.
Mate comes running up.*

MATE (*completely winded*): He's still talking!

FIRST ENGINEER: Fuck it all! Just let him keep at it.

Then he leans towards the generator and peers inside it, anxious.

SECOND ENGINEER (*also working on the generator*): How far has he gotten?

MATE: The Comintern...Now he's on the part about the resolution...

SECOND ENGINEER (*to the others, with concern*): He's already gotten to the Comintern part.

The engineer who'd been bent over the generator now lifts his head. His face is covered in sweat.

It's a young man, perhaps twenty-eight or thirty years old (Čulak). He shakes his head. Everyone stands there aghast.

NIKOLA (*to Mate*): Go upstairs. Scream out some slogans...Don't let him finish.

Engineer Čulak bangs his fist impotently against the massive casing of the generator.

ENGINEER ČULAK: Fuck you all to hell! Dammit!

Nikola turns once more to Mate, who is standing there as if petrified.

NIKOLA: What, didn't I give you something to do? Upstairs, on the double!...Shout out some slogans and don't let him finish talking...Why are you just standing here like a deer in the headlights?

Mate sets off at a run.

NIKOLA (*shouting after him*): And sing—strike up some songs!

ENGINEER ČULAK: Stop! Did you hear me? Stop!

Mate halts.

ENGINEER ČULAK: That's not going to do us any good...Go grab the telephone instead. (*Directs Mate to its location.*) Call Pancakijevič...He's here in town, you know. In the Grand Hotel.

Mate sets off, again, at a run.

ENGINEER ČULAK: Whoa, there! Where are you sprinting off to? (*Mate halts once more.*) Tell him this: Engineer Čulak orders him to get over here, hell or high water...dead, alive, or drunk... Got that?

Mate darts off, with Čulak shouting at him so loudly that the room echoes.

ENGINEER ČULAK: Dead or alive, d'you hear?...Dead or alive!

Then he turns to confer with an older engineer.

ENGINEER ČULAK: And you, Comrade Radan, you work on the Minister. You know what I mean...You're old friends from the war. He'll understand what you mean...Otherwise we are going to humiliate ourselves before the whole world ...And we'll end up on Goli Otok...for sabotage—

FIRST ENGINEER: Now what the hell is wrong with this thing? *(Peers into the generator.)*

ENGINEER ČULAK *(to Radan, as he pats him on the shoulder and simultaneously gives him a little push)*: Go on! Go one now! Just another half hour. Forty-five minutes...No more than that. Till that old drunkard gets here...*(To the others, but as if to himself.)* If he won't help us out of this, then I swear there'll be no place he can hide!

ENGINEER RADAN *(starts to leave, brow deeply knitted, grumbling)*: Fine, fine. For Christ's sake! We've really made a hash of this. *(After he had already hurried away a few steps, to himself.)* We are all going to follow in Grčić's footsteps...to Goli Otok...

HYDROELECTRIC PLANT/DAY

THE GOVERNMENT MINISTER: These new generators will mobilize our hitherto unexploited natural resource of water, and our electric motors will then power thousands of machines and pieces of equipment all across our land...What is it then, comrades, that enables us to achieve results like these? Where exactly does our strength lie? Above all—

MATE *(out of breath, but as loudly as he can)*: Long live our working-class youth!

ALL: Hoooooray!

MATE: Long live the Central Committee of the Communist Party!

ALL: Hoooooray!

The minister signals for them to stop.

THE GOVERNMENT MINISTER: Comrades, this has been made possible first and foremost—

MATE: Long live the alliance between workers and peasants!

ALL: Hoooooray!

THE GOVERNMENT MINISTER: Above all, comrades, what has rendered this possible is our—

MATE: Long live shock workers! Long live workplace innovators!

ALL: Hoooooray!

At that point a factory manager (Radan) goes up to the minister and whispers in his ear while Mate continues “pushing the meeting button.”

MATE: Ti-to, Par-ty, Ti-to, Par-ty—

Everyone chants.

The government minister hears Radan out and then nods his head. He drinks a glass of water.

THE GOVERNMENT MINISTER: Comrades! Our glorious national liberation struggle, which has steeled the great revolutionary forces of our nationalities and their working class, along with the *avant-garde*—

A HOTEL ROOM

The door to the corridor, from inside. A knock comes from the other side. The knocking gets louder, more insistent.

FIRST VOICE: Run to the desk in the lobby and ring him up on the phone...I'll bet he's drunk.

SECOND VOICE: The key's in the lock.

Their hammering grows more intense.

The sound of the telephone startles us. It rings a long while, insistently. The banging starts up again.

FIRST VOICE: They need you urgently...Hello?...Can you hear me?

The key is in the lock. The large pear-shaped tag of the hotel key bounces around from the powerful blows of a fist on the door.

HOTEL LOBBY

A baroque hotel with staircase.

In front of the door to Room 216 two men are standing. One has on a leather jacket (an UDBA agent), and the other is in a black suit and bow-tie (the manager of the hotel).

Right by them there's a waitress sporting a white apron. She's holding a tray with a džezva filled with Turkish coffee and one little cup—along with a bottle of rakija. The manager is crouching in front of the door. He has pressed his eye up to the keyhole.

MANAGER (*straightening back up*): Can't see anything...He's pulled the curtains.

WAITRESS: He just called me less than ten minutes ago and told me to bring coffee and *rakija*.

UDBA AGENT: How long ago, comrade?

The hotel manager stares ferociously at the waitress.

MANAGER: Five minutes ago. Not even that.

UDBA AGENT: We'll have to bust it down.

Inside, the phone keeps ringing insistently.

DIRECTOR: We have a locksmith. (*To the young woman.*) Run down and call the super...Tell him to be here in two minutes. Go!

The young woman, frightened, leaves. But then, as she reaches the bottom of the stairs, she gives a start.

We can hear the sound of the door being smashed in.

HOTEL ROOM

With swift movements the hotel manager pulls back the heavy drapes.

The light of day bursts into the room. The phone is still ringing.

The UDBA agent kneels next to the bed and feels for Engineer Pancakijevič's pulse.

The room is a mess. The bed is a wreck.

On the nightstand there's a glass that's tipped over, and a bottle of rakija.

A container of pills. Books.

Pancakijevič is lying on the floor close to the bed, half-dressed, turned on his side. His head is lying in his own vomit.

The UDBA man lets go of the deceased engineer's hand.

HYDROELECTRIC PLANT/DAY

Everyone is applauding.

The government minister comes down from the platform, accompanied by other government representatives and those from the army and union. Beside him walks Engineer Radan, the factory manager, sweating profusely. He wipes his face with a handkerchief. Tries to force a smile.

He shows the government minister the button on the control panel that he is supposed to push.

The minister presses down on the button...

The minister applauds. Waves of applause.

THE GENERATOR ROOM

The generator starts up with a tremendous racket.

The engineers, gathered together in the control room not far away, exchange victory embraces.

The generator's racket drowns out their cries of joy.

The sudden wheezing of the big machine. Looks of consternation on the engineers' faces.

The generator stalls out.

HYDROELECTRIC PLANT/EXTERIOR

The government minister's face suddenly darkens.

The abrupt cessation of the machine's noises makes the silence which has settled onto the assembled crowd even heavier and more palpable.

Mate's horrified face.

Mate cups his hands around his mouth, as if to make his voice carry better, and then he shouts at the top of his lungs.

MATE: Long live shock workers, the pride of our labor collective!

His voice rang out ten times stronger in the silence.

A SET OF TEN VOICES: Hoooooray!

The people standing close to Mate stare at him with astonishment and reproach on their faces. The factory manager (Engineer Radan) goes up to the minister and whispers something in his ear.

THE GENERATOR ROOM

Once again, everyone is gathered around the mouth of the generator. Engineer Čulak is in the process of pulling on his blue work coveralls over his suit. He already has rubber boots on his feet.

AN ENGINEER: Stop! What is wrong with you?

Engineer Čulak threads the zipper on his coveralls and zips them up with a decisive motion.

ENGINEER ČULAK (*more to himself than to anyone else*): Before he hangs himself, a man always puts a fold of newspaper over the stool so that it doesn't get dirty.

Tries to force a smile.

Then he dons his plastic helmet, picks up a toolbox, and starts to descend into the huge, yawning mouth of the machine.

AN ENGINEER (*grabbing Čulak's shoulder*): Have you lost your mind?...It's certain death, man...Don't let him—

Everyone stands there motionless, rooted to the spot.

Engineer Čulak places his hand over the engineer's hand on his shoulder.

CEMETERY/DAY

An open grave.

The grave-diggers are just withdrawing the ropes with which they had

let the casket down into the opening.

A black coffin in the depths of the hole. The first clumps of earth and an occasional flower land on it.

Engineers and workers crowd around the grave. Among them we glimpse Engineer Čulak, Radan, Mate, Nikola, Marija, the hotel manager, the waitress, etc.

On one of the wreaths we see the message: "TO ENGINEER V.I. PANCAKIJEVIČ, FROM THE FACTORY COLLECTIVE."

Engineer Čulak takes up a position at the graveside. He opens up the box containing the Knight's Cross and tosses it into the hole. Then he throws in the box lined with velvet, too.

*At that moment the small band strikes up the music of "Lenin's Burial March."*⁷

All around: stern faces lost in thought.

The impact of dirt landing with a bang on the lumber of the coffin. The undertakers are shoveling it in now.

HYDROELECTRIC PLANT/DAY

It's the same hydroelectric facility that we saw earlier, when it was being brought on line. Engineer Čulak is standing on a hilltop above the dam. In the background we can hear the rumbling of turbines.

ENGINEER ČULAK (*thirty years older*): What're you gonna do—I was young. (*Grins.*) Young and impulsive. (*Pause.*) But, hey, that wasn't heroism of any sort...It was spite. (*Pause. Grins.*) I didn't think about it at all at the time...I let myself down to where the flanges were...checked a few connections. (*Pause.*) At most it took three or four minutes—I don't know. But it did seem to me like I was down there for half an hour at least... (*Pause.*) Yes, for that achievement I got a medal from the federal government...And a reward in cash. (*Laughs.*) And fabric to make a suit with...That was the first suit I ever had tailored. (*Pause.*) And you can see yourself that's it's still running....No

⁷ "Lenin's Burial March" from 1924 was an old revolutionary song known as "You Fell as Sacrifice." It was later memorialized, and popularized in the West, as the melody of the Third Movement of the 11th *Symphony* of the famous Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich.

breakdowns. *(Pause.)* ...Things were just that way back then... *(Pause.)* Yes, precisely...I did not know that Pancakijevič was dead. I thought he was just drunk again...The thing is, I just knew I hadn't seen him. I knew we weren't in a position to wait any longer and that the scandal would be endless...so...*(Pause.)* Yes, I felt sorry for him...*(Pause.)* The minister thanked us publicly for it afterwards. He said: I was more afraid of falling into disgrace over this than you...and, by the way, if you had not gotten that thing started, I would've had you all arrested... He was kidding—I think. *(Pause.)* It's true that Pancakijevič helped us a great deal...He could stay for ten days in his hotel room without coming out...and then, when things got dicey, he'd spend ten more days hunched over the plans with us... Anyway, that's why we had brought him back with us for the ceremonial start-up of the hydroelectric plant...He was in that hotel again. *(Pause.)* In those days I was a young engineer. I was going on in his field. *(Pause.)* In the final analysis, all this left us young engineers with a clear conscience...We demonstrated that we could stand on our own.

CEMETERY/DAY

Engineer Čulak is standing by an anonymous grave-mound. A rotting cross, with no inscription, juts up from it. Evidently the letters it once bore have fallen off.

ENGINEER ČULAK *(pointing at the grave)*: It could be this one...I don't remember exactly *(Pause.)* But it was an unusual destiny, in case you're interested. *(Pause.)* OK, then...He was a Russian emigrant, an engineer from Tsarist times...During the war he worked with von Braun on several projects...His specialty was submarines. As luck would have it, he found himself in Bohemia on the day the Allies bombarded Berlin...

They walk about in the graveyard.

ENGINEER ČULAK: Later on he worked in the old Škoda factory. And the Americans bombed that. And once more he survived.

He ended up as a Russian POW. The long and short of it is that in the pandemonium of World War II he lost his wife and children...At that point he swore that he would never work on armaments again. And that he would try to repair what could be repaired...He was sent to us as part of a program of technical assistance...Fell in love with our country. Because of the tobacco and *rakija*, or so he said. (*Pause.*) One day he learned that his wife was actually alive. She had gotten out of the Soviet camps and gone to East Germany, where she married an officer. She had been living, you see, in the conviction that he was dead. She sought a divorce...The divorce settlement came later on the same day that he died...(*Pause. Grins.*) So, did you know about all that?...Well, yes, we buried him according to our customs. I don't think it'd be worth showing that. It wouldn't be expedient. No, it wouldn't. You know, later on the UDBA made inquiries about his funeral. How did it come to pass, they asked, that we arranged for a recipient of the Knight's Cross to have "Lenin's Burial March" at his funeral? But I think he atoned for his deeds...

PLANNING DEPARTMENT OF THE FACTORY

Engineer Čulak in a spacious office setting.

Architects and draftsmen are working at tables.

On the walls: large photographs, graphs, designs.

Engineer Čulak is facing the window. Outside one sees a panoramic view of the new factory.

ENGINEER ČULAK (*smiling*): I was ordered here, too...I thought I was going to remain for just a year or two...And then...but as you can see, I developed a soft spot for the people here. For the machines.

Then he recoils, as if someone had just asked him an unpleasant question.

ENGINEER ČULAK: Correct. I was already working here then... yes, some people were arrested. Yes, I remember. Of course...

FACTORY FLOOR/DAY

Women workers, busily spooling wire onto reels.

Among them, Marija Kučan. Standing above them, a female clerk with a notebook in her hand is recording results. In front of them, in a conspicuous spot, is a victory pennant.

The women are working at double-time. They smile at one another, as if to lend encouragement.

The clerk, having entered the data, moves on.

Then we hear folk songs coming out of the loudspeaker.

Now we are shown other workers, some of them shock workers, doing various tasks on other shop floors.

On large wall signs: COMRADE, TAKE CARE OF YOUR TOOL! OUR GOAL IS TO EXCEED THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN. SHOCK WORKERS, THE PRIDE AND JOY OF OUR WORKING COLLECTIVE.

Hands, operating machines. One worker halts for a moment. He takes a cube of sugar out of his pocket and places it in his mouth. Then he takes a drink of water from a tin cup.

The music coming from the loudspeaker stops momentarily.

The racket of the machine.

FEMALE ANNOUNCER (*off*): It has been observed that some irresponsible comrades are using hot water whenever it pleases them, so that it runs out before the end of working hours. Therefore, in the future, the boilers will be opened up only at 2:45...Those comrades washing their hands with cold water are not allowed to make use of sand or pea-gravel, because doing so clogs up the pipes and damages the people's property.

Then, folk music once more.

A worker, at the machine he's operating, leans towards another fellow to whisper something in his ear...The second worker smiles.

Jure cups his palms around his mouth. He's imitating the voice of the announcer and the buzzing of the speaker.

JURE: It is forbidden to wipe one's ass with tar-paper.

Everybody laughs.

FEMALE ANNOUNCER: Our factory's union chapter recently received a letter from Stanko Bukalo, former member of the Party and our working collective who was arrested for activities against the interests of the people...

Suddenly the smiles disappear from the workers' faces.

Serious faces, both stern and curious. They leave off work for a couple of moments.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE: At the time when the notorious Cominform resolution was published—

The loudspeaker starts to crackle even more, and the voice becomes unintelligible.

Panorama shot of the workers, men and women, at various spots on the factory floor, as well as of the engineers in the planning offices and at sundry machines. Everyone pauses for a moment. Some of them look up at the speaker, in anticipation of a continuation of the message.

One worker turns to Jure, while the speaker hums.

WORKER: Hold it, who was that?...The old director?

JURE: Korčagin.

WORKER: I didn't know that was his name—

The speaker buzzes.

WORKER: Is that the guy who went out with Nada? This same Nada?

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE (NADA): Excuse the technical difficulties...

She resumes reading.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE (NADA): ...At the time of the publication of the notorious Cominform resolution, he attempted in his circle of friends and co-workers to establish an illegal organization to fight against our Party and our people...In the letter to our chapter, he wrote, in part—

OFFICE WITH PUBLIC-ADDRESS SYSTEM/DAY/INTERIOR

*A small, improvised studio in one of the factory barracks.
A young woman is seated at the microphone. We recognize her as Nada
(who is now two or three years older). In front of her is a sheet of paper
from which she's reading.*

NADA (ANNOUNCER): "...Dear Comrades, I am writing you from the site of the 'Mermer' construction project, where I am performing socially useful labor...I think back to you and your factory often... Maybe, comrades, there are in your collective still some who are sticking to their pro-Cominform positions. It is your duty as patriots and politically conscious workers to join in the unyielding fight against them and to close ranks firmly around the factory committee and our leadership...and under their management to give your all for the fulfillment of the five-year plan aimed at renewing and developing our country. My dear comrades,—"

THE FACTORY FLOOR

*For a moment, nearly everyone has stopped working. They are listening.
The thoughtful faces of Jure, Marija, Nikola.*

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE (NADA): —the Party is a mother who spares neither the rod nor the loving embrace...It is thanks to precisely this magnanimity of the Party and our illustrious UDBA that—

Nada's voice is starting to quiver. She's agitated.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE (NADA): I managed to save myself from the depths of the villainy into which I wanted to drag others and into which I myself was pushed by the shameful Cominform resolution. (*Pause.*) My dear comrades, when I read the name of your factory in the newspaper and when I hear details about the success our worker's collective—"

*Marija keeps her eyes focused on the speaker, a look of concern on her face.
Nada's voice grows more and more uncertain, until all at once, her sobbing can be made out above the humming of the microphone.*

OFFICE WITH PUBLIC-ADDRESS SYSTEM

The door opens abruptly. Marija enters.

Nada is in her chair but has her head on the control panel. She is sobbing. Nikola is there as well. He pushes a couple of circuit-breakers, evidently with the intention of disconnecting the microphone.

Marija is hunched over Nada. She strokes her hair and tries to get Nada to her feet.

THE FACTORY YARD/DAY

The driver of a forklift starts his engine again.

The machine starts off with its load. From the speaker: a folk song.

THE BANKS OF THE SAVA RIVER/SUNSET

The boat carrying Nikola has just reached shore.

Nikola tosses a rope to the people on the shore (whom we do not see).

He sits there for some time, oars raised. Lights a cigarette. Talks.

NIKOLA (*thoughtfully*):...Take her, for instance...Yes, she killed herself. And she left a letter: that she had completely committed herself to that unfortunate relationship. And, so she said, she was pretty close to going down the same path he did...(Pause.) Yes, she volunteered to read that letter on the air...But, I don't know, I'm not sure, comrades, if I'd mention that. These are tragic events. And, if I may say so, atypical events. (Pause.) I know, I know...you'd like to show this part also...Not only the successes, and the machinery. (Pause.) You see, though, my heart really goes out to all of those women, and those girls, who came out of the villages back then, and from the working-class districts of the cities, and took jobs here...The times were hard...Look around today and you'll see many of them in high-level jobs. Some are already retired...Their children are grown, they have families, etc....(Pause.) Indeed, it was all very dramatic...love and politics, all mixed up together. (Pause.) Or

the woman I spoke of earlier. Let's call her Marija...She came from the village as a young woman—I won't mention her real name, because everyone would know who I'm talking about... So, she was young, and not ugly. You could even say she was pretty...In a word, an example of our revolutionary youth, a shock-worker, etc....And we elected her to all kinds of forums and committees, to the union and the AFŽ,⁸ everything...Then there was her schooling, the specialized training, promotions at work, obligations...(Pause. Pensive.) And nowadays, when I hear Arsen Dedić sing "Stara cura",⁹ she comes to mind, and somehow or another I feel guilty. (Pause.) You see, she simply wasn't strong enough for everything we demanded of her...for the things she demanded of herself...

He hurls his cigarette butt into the water and rises to his feet abruptly.

He picks up his satchel with the fish in it.

Leaps ashore.

He smiles as he shoulders the bag.

NIKOLA: My old lady's going to think I picked these up at the market...

Walks towards his vehicle, which is parked some distance away, in the dried remnants of last summer's cornfield.

NIKOLA: Perhaps a film ought to be made about our beginnings here...About the long road our factory has travelled. (*Comes to a halt, points his finger into the distance.*) See there? Once that was just cornfields and wasteland...and two or three barracks...We ate bread, and onions and lard. (*Chuckles.*) And we were young.

Waves off with his hand.

NIKOLA: I know, I know...the successes are on display. We have quite enough graphs, and they are quite satisfying—as one of

⁸ The Anti-fascist Women's Front (AFŽ, or *Antifašistička fronta žena*), was a Communist-dominated opposition group that operated as part of the Partisan movement. It was founded in 1942 and, until its dissolution in 1953, served also as a vehicle for the advancement of women's rights and for the education and political mobilization of women more generally.

⁹ Arsen Dedić (b. 1938) is a Croatian singer and composer of popular music and author. The title of this short, sad song is "Spinster".

our folks used to say. Still, there'd be a lot of stories here. Rises and falls...All kinds of things...For instance, there's an engineer who devoted his entire life and all his health to this plant. *(Pause.)* And lots of other things like that.

He's now reached his car.

Loads his fishing gear into it and puts the satchel with fish into the trunk.

Opens the driver's-side door, and then stops.

NIKOLA: Nevertheless it'd probably be good, comrades, if you asked someone first...for someone to advise you whether it's a good idea to show everything. *(Pause.)* All of that...and the stuff with the Cominform...That's all hard to explain.

Shuts his door with a bang. Starts his engine.

Then he lets down his side window and sticks his head out.

NIKOLA: Well, and there were nicer things, too, you know...Happier things...At any rate, before you jump in with both feet, ask somebody else—

The noise of the motor prevents us from hearing what it is we are supposed to ask.

NIKOLA *(yelling)*: —You'll see—

A VOICE *(off, shouting back at him)*: Who-do-we-ask-?

Now, for the first time, we see the film crew that has been carrying out the interviews with Nikola and the others. (Sometimes the team has been showing them excerpts from the film they are making, about them and their work—and which is based on their own statements.)

Everyone from the crew is now assembled in one spot: the director's assistant, cameraman, scriptwriter (the only woman), sound designer...

In a flash the cameraman detaches his camera from the tripod and sprints through the corn stubble and mud behind Nikola's automobile. Everybody runs after him.

The car pulls away, rolling faster and faster along the shore, through the cornstalks, and then it comes out onto the road.

In the mud, deep tracks left by the Nikola's car tires.

They all stop running. Everyone's out of breath. They watch helplessly as

Nikola's vehicle disappears in the distance. Sundown over the rose-colored landscape.

The sounds of Eroica. Just like what we heard at the concert in the cafeteria.

THE END

APPENDIX



DOCUMENT I: “Foreword (to *Night and Fog*)” by Danilo Kiš

SOURCE: Appeared at the beginning of the published anthology.

I.

The *dramolet* (which is perhaps a more felicitous designation than the overly technical expression “TV drama”) *Night and Fog* is not the product of pure imagination. The persons appearing here by the names “Mrs. Rigo” and “Emil” are transcriptions of real people. When I, after some twenty years, made a pilgrimage back to that area of Hungary where I spent part of my childhood, I didn’t come across my old teacher; she had moved away, to Budapest, where I also looked for her. She became a delegate to the national assembly; she was, as they say, an activist. Her husband was also in an important, if local, post. Despite some good deeds they did for us during the war, I recall quite clearly and concretely that they both sympathized with the *Nyilasok*, the Hungarian fascists. The director of the television program rejected, out of an overabundance of caution, the idea that I work with my heroes against that exact background, so my first foray into drama was reduced to a set of lyrical variations on the theme of time and memory. Of the allusions to our history remained only the title—a literal translation of the infamous Nazi phrase *Nacht und Nebel*, the significance of which apparently slipped by the director.

The Parrot is a vague reflection of the so-called “June demonstrations” of 1968. The main character is a sentimental, half-educated young man, who is as garrulous as a parrot and stuffed with political and literary commonplaces; the “red bourgeoisie”, frightened and disoriented, first shows itself to be wretchedly craven, but then, at the end, it is “firing from all barrels”. If memory serves,

the basis for the drama I found in a *fait divers* (as the French call the crime page in their newspaper, and crime stories in general); or perhaps a similar item ran in the paper after this play was broadcast on our television network.

The beginnings of the drama *A Wooden Trunk for Thomas Wolfe* lay in a fortuitous project—or the unfortunate absence of better ideas—of one of the directors at the TV studio who suggested to a group of seven of us writers, including me, to write a dramatic treatment on the theme of one of the deadly sins. Since I already had in mind a complete model of a character who could serve as the paradigm of laziness, I signed onto the proposal. The anecdote about a wooden trunk or crate is thus true, just as the character of the unhappy writer, spending his life in a holding pattern waiting for heavenly portents of inspiration, is authentic. An old friend of mine, someone I got to know in Strasbourg, served as my model for this; this Oblomov-like figure hangs like a shadow over the entire didactic play. His will had been killed off in one of the German camps, to which he had been deported as a child, after having survived the inferno of the Warsaw uprising. He lived from meager reparation payments, but he inhabited a world of nightmares. It was his naive belief that, for literature, the experience of having suffered was sufficient.

As for the other characters in this work, the doctor originated as the fusion of two real persons, both of whom I also knew: one was a good old fellow from Russia and the other was a good old professor of ceramics and drawing, by ethnicity a Hungarian from the Czech lands, who at one time paid money to take a French language course from me. Although the character of the writer in this drama undoubtedly has a portion of my own deadly sin—since my reply to the query on the Proust Questionnaire: “For which fault do you have the most indulgence?” is nothing other than “laziness”—I nevertheless hope that I have not utterly betrayed the aforementioned good people and done injustice to their memory.

II.

I leoni meccanici

When the offer came from two enthusiasts in Zenica—Marušić and Martinović, and from the theater director Georgijevski¹—for me to do a dramatization of my own prose text entitled *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, my gut reaction was completely naïve, showing great inexperience (for empirically acquired evidence, besides theoretical knowledge, is the only kind of experience that is practical and suitable for literature). In other words, I accepted the offer. My thinking, like theirs, was that this prose text, these “seven chapters of one and the same tale,” could be repurposed as a *text for the stage* without major effort—meaning that by employing some kind of direct transfer of each and every one of the dramatic situations into stage dialogues and theatrical forms. That meant, according to our initial premises, executing a more or less faithful copy, or even a collage, of designated, integral prose (narrative) units that had their own dramatic tension in the book entitled *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, and above all in the eponymous story. (The method is thus close to, or identical with, the one that Ljubiša Ristić applies in his approach to my book that he calls *The Mass in A Minor*.²) But this premise, I believe, proved to be inaccurate, at least in my case; and the procedure, on the level of a dramatic text, turned out inadequate. I actually discovered the climax, the dramatic nexus, in that part of my text (referring here to the specific story named “A Tomb for Boris Davidovich”) where two principles meet in conflict, two characters, two ways of looking at the world, at life and death, existence and essence, two conceptions of morality, two finalities: in the clash, head to head, between the revolutionary B.D. Novski and the investigating magistrate Fedjukin. But this text, in its story format, is transmitted by narrative means, suggestive ones (I’m speaking here of procedure,

¹ Here Kiš means Ljubiša Georgijevski, a Macedonian director of film and stage born in 1937.

² Ristić is a Serbian stage and film director who knew Kiš well and created the play *The Mass in A Minor* in the mid-1970s based on the story “A Tomb for Boris Davidovich.”

not passing judgment), and therefore the means are metaphoric, some kind of petrified, condensed image, or set of images; here, where the “dramatic”, topical clash reaches its peak, at its apogee, at this intersection of all the forces, all at once *every chance for dialogue* disappears, everything develops into a metaphor, a spasm, into partial shade, quivering light, fog, smoke, labored breathing, in which the only other thing that is clearly audible is the occasional mechanical noise of a typewriter; there the “mechanical lions,” representing clearly defined opposing conceptions, are no longer fighting like humans, with human means and through human will, but are only propelled by the forceful forward thrust of their own ideas. There is no longer any place for human words or for normal, healthy human reactions. Therefore, in the story, right at that point where words would be most needed for the clash in its theatrical mode—there are no words, no dialogue: “Two men wrestled, in the long nights, with the laborious text of a confession; they were out of breath and worn down, hunched over the pages amidst a thick cloud of cigarette smoke, and both of them were attempting to insert into the pages some of their passions and convictions, a part of their view of the situation from a higher perspective.” Somewhere here all of my premises about the possibility of mechanical transformation, about re-potting, about the conversion of a prose text into one for the stage are on full display. What we have here is the stuff, the fabric, of prose demonstrating its resistance, the resistance of its very matter; the mechanistic concept is breaking apart into fragments. That’s why a completely fresh start is needed. I had to write a drama “using the motifs of the book of the same name.” To transform metaphor into personification, to give to the “mechanical lions”, which are making faces at one another (each from his own cage), a human voice, but not to destroy their metonymic and metaphoric essence and their leonine automatism that drives them on with its inexorable mechanical momentum. If every effort leads to understanding (apart from whatever utilitarian goal it might have), then this effort bears fruit, for me personally, in a new experience: that the material of prose and drama are at bottom different, incongruent, which is to say they are of different material, made of substances of varying specific weight and, therefore, they act and react according to completely different laws.

Writing this piece for the stage, I was aware of the fact that certain problematic technical requirements—above all, in connections with the changing of physical space and chronological dimensions—could be consistently carried out only with the techniques of montage for television or the cinema. This is also true for the micro-scenes that were conceptualized as on a spatially large scale.

D.K.

DOCUMENT 2: “Note (to *Night and Fog*)” by Danilo Kiš

SOURCE: Appeared at the end of the published anthology.

Night and Fog was shown twice on Belgrade television, in January and July of 1968, and it was also screened at the festival of Yugoslav television drama in Bled. Director: Slavoljub Stevanović Ravasi. With: Miša Janketić, Ljiljan Krstić, and Svetolik Nikačević. The same director also did *Night and Fog* for Dutch television, where, in a production by TV Hilversum, it was performed under the title *Mist*. It was published in a book called *Anthology of Television Drama* by RTV Belgrade in 1969.

The TV drama known as *The Parrot* was broadcast on Belgrade television in April, 1970. Director: Aleksandar Đorđević. With: Rade Šerbedžija, Ksenija Jovanović, and Branko Pleša.

A Wooden Crate for Thomas Wolfe was shown on Channel Two in Belgrade in early 1974. In December of that same year it was reprinted on Channel One. The piece was also shown at the Prix Italia competition in Florence, and as part of the festival in Portorož. It was directed by Branko Ivanda, with the roles played by Zoran Radmilović and Slobodan Perović.

The Mechanical Lions (under the title *A Tomb for Boris Davidović*), directed by Ljubiša Georgijevski, was staged for the first time at the People's Theater of Zenica, on October 8, 1980, after which it was also put on, in June of the following year, at the Sterija Popović

Stage Festival in Novi Sad and then at the National Theater in Belgrade. Starring: Zdravko Biogradlija (Novski) and Žarko Mijatović (Fedjugin). Playing the other roles were: Anka Đorđević, Radmila Prajninger, Milenko Goranović, Desa Biogradlija, Milka Filipović, Jasna Bašić, Borislav Cvetković, Slavko Mihačević, Boško Marić, Miodrag Trifunović, Faruk Zadić, Seada Suljić, Šefika Korkut-Šunje, Branko Petković...Set designer: Radovan Mrušić. As *A Tomb for Boris Davidović, a Drama in Nineteen Scenes with a False Epilogue*, this text was published by NIRO “Književne novine” of Belgrade in 1981.

DOCUMENT 3: “About Electra” by Danilo Kiš³

SOURCE: Appeared at the end of the published version of *Electra*.

This is, as far as I know, the sixteenth or seventeenth literary variation on the theme of Electra. In the classical world this “horribly sad play” was reworked by Aeschylus in *The Libation Bearers*, and later by both Attius⁴ and Cicero’s brother, Quintus Tullius⁵ in addition to the treatment by Euripides. After the time of the Renaissance the French were especially drawn to the theme: Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon published his *Electra* in 1708, Voltaire his *Orestes* in 1750, Leconte de Lisle his *Les Érinnyes* in 1873 (based on Aeschylus), and, in the 20th century, a hundred years after de Lisle,⁶ Jean Giraudoux scored a hit with his *Electra* (1937). Among the writers developing the themes of Electra in the German-speaking world were Johann Jakob Bodmer in his drama *Elektra oder die gerechte*

³ Kiš cites many of the works in this essay in Serbo-Croatian translations or at least phonetic equivalents; many of the entries are also cryptic or idiosyncratically constructed. There I have put the bibliographic references in this essay (authors and works) into more modern and complete form so that the information is more useful to interested researchers. The same work in what we might call extended translation was also done for the references in Documents 1 and 4.

⁴ The reference here is likely to Lucius Attius (170–103 B.C.), a Roman poet who wrote the tragedies *Agamemnonidae* and *Erigona*.

⁵ Quintus Tullius Cicero (102–43 B.C.) was a controversial, impulsive military leader who also wrote four tragedies. All are lost.

⁶ An error seems to have crept into Kiš’s notes here. The original of his text lists the publication date of *Les Érinnyes* as 1837, but it was actually 1873. It follows then that Giraudoux’s interpretation appeared less than a century later.

Übelthat (1760), Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter in *Orestes and Electra* (1772), August Ehlert in *Klytämnestra* (1881), Georg Siegert in his own *Klytämnestra* and Hugo von Hofmannsthal in *Elektra* (1904). Here we can mention also the Italian Vittorio Alfieri (*Oreste*, 1786) and the Spaniard Benito Pérez Galdós (*Electra*, 1904); recently in our country Jovan Hristić published a quite modern free variation on this classical theme. Miloš Đurić has found a reference to a translation by Dominko Zlatarić of Sophocles' *Elektra* from 1597 (and this may well be the case, since whenever we discuss issues from antiquity in this country, his name is brought up); again, citing Đurić, that was the first large-scale rendition of any work of Hellenic literature in our language.

*

When the experimental chamber theater “Atelje 212” decided to add to its repertory a classical drama (classical as in “of antiquity”), with the requirement that it fit the modern conception of directing, and when the choice fell on Euripides' *Electra*, the immediate next step concerned adaptation. (At the root level in this dramatic work there is, therefore, a linguistic issue—something that would doubtless stoke the enthusiasm of structuralists!) To wit, even the classic translation by Koloman Rac,⁷ the only extant one in our language, and the one used to introduce numerous generations of people to Euripides, had already been shown to be completely incompatible with today's senses of speech and hearing on stage. The fidelity to the original, with regard to metrics, was probably the sole distinction of that translation, but it proved to be a hazard. The text is clunky and in places almost utterly unintelligible. So when the theater offered the translation of *Electra* to a specialist in Hellenic literature, once more (to the great joy of structuralists!) the fundamental problem of language came up. That translator, namely, insisted as much on metric fidelity to the original, on which he was without a doubt in the right, as on linguistic differences between individual characters. As one of the solutions for clearly differentiating between the localisms of individual figures,

⁷ Koloman Rac (1863–1937) was a Croatian philologist and teacher.

he had suggested, if I recall correctly, a variant in which the Peasant (the Mason in my version) spoke in Bosnian dialect, in contrast to Electra who would talk in...and so forth. So the management ended up entrusting me with “translating” Koloman Rac’s translation, or, as we say, adapting it. What was obvious to me from the outset was that this kind of work is excruciating and tedious. Approaching Rac’s text, therefore, with the innocence of the non-specialist, not to mention the unsophisticated naïveté of the poet, I began to write on the assigned theme my own lines of verse, or more precisely, my own strophes, maintaining at the start only a basic thread of ideas. This type of free association, so satisfying, was close to what I had suggested once to some of my friends who are poets and (true!) connoisseurs of the French language: taking verses by Spanish poets and translating them in this way, by means of a sketchily perceived armature of meaning—and not by peering into a dictionary! Later, carried away with this game, but guarding against the danger of distancing myself too much from the text (for in the final analysis I was being paid for Euripides’ *Electra*), I started to open up, metaphorically speaking, larger and smaller parenthetical bracketings and enclosures in the play by turning monologues into dialogues and by bringing indirect speech into the direct action on stage, etc.

Of course there was no way for this kind of free association on a dramatic text not to lead to changes in the figures over and above the underscoring of their characters. That’s where the issue of psychological nuancing comes in. Insofar as Euripides was the most intensely psychological of the classical dramatists, the psychology of his characters was clearly that of the time in which the author lived. Obviously this meant a kind of psychology conditioned more than anything by the precepts of divine ethics or the rules of opaque heavenly machinations. Naturally I preserved the gods, attempting to reduce them to anthropodicy, to “that which is divine in the human heart.” As for the chorus, it is well known that Euripides was at his weakest there, and that critics as far back as Aristotle found fault with him for having choral parts that didn’t flow organically out of the plot of the drama but are simply inserted. Seeking, therefore, in his choir scores some kind of basic core,

those singular lines that touch the essence, I attempted to create variations on a few themes that a director could make use of in the form of “songs”, as one says nowadays in theater jargon.

In regard to Pylades, who is Orestes’ companion and shadow, I boiled him down ultimately to his proper profile, which one can sense too in Euripides’ version, where he only has inconsequential lines. Thus he becomes a shadow of a human being, a Neanderthal or a spineless, useless person—it doesn’t matter which; the point is that he’s mute, and I imagine him as an awkward deaf-mute slave who comes across on the stage, particularly in the bloody and tragic scenes, as a ghastly, ghostly figure, perhaps sensitive and intimidated, but also cruel and—by dint of his impotent howling and mumbling, in his blind obedience to Orestes’ will, and in his preposterous staggering about—unnerving. He is, ultimately, perhaps the one positive character in this blood-soaked play, the mute observer and accidental participant. Could he not feasibly be Orestes’ double, his positive but incompetent alter ego, his conscience? Maybe one gets a presentiment of this through a mask, in a quasi-classical manner.

The other characters, I believe, can say what they need to say to the director themselves, and they should be at his mercy and he at theirs. As for the dedication to Artaud, it should bind the director to the same degree to which it put me under obligation. That means: considerably. Without a doubt one must put a full measure of brutality into this play.

Just one thing more: watching Cacoyannis’ *Electra* (1962) on film, with the marvelous Irene Papas, I noticed (and I believe I’m right about this) in the funeral ceremonies, and in the harshness of the stone and the faces, in the dirges, in the climate and the views of the countryside, in the sun, and in the hearts of the men and women, a certain similarity to the spiritual landscape and harsh moral climate that one associates in some ways with traditional, folkloric Montenegro. Perhaps that’s why we also have so many decasyllabic epics, frequent curses, and lamentations in our country’s culture?

DOCUMENT 4: “(Notes on *Electra*)” by Mirjana Miočinović

SOURCE: Published as part of the section *Notes* at the end of the posthumous volume *Skladište*.

Electra (after Euripides) was written in 1968 and had its premiere, at Atelje 212, on November 12 of that year. Relabeled *Electra* 69, it was performed, out of competition, at the third BITEF⁸ on September 4, 1969. That show also marked the end of Kiš's collaboration with Atelje 212, which had begun back in 1965. Out of the experience he gained as a dramaturge with this outfit emerged Kiš's three television dramas (*Night and Fog*, *The Parrot*, and *A Wooden Trunk for Thomas Wolfe*) as well as the dramatization he made of his short story “A Grave for Boris Davidovich.” These pieces, along with *Elektra*, make up the totality of Kiš's dramatic work, although technically one should add to that corpus the large number of translations of others' dramatic texts he produced (Corneille's *Le Cid*, Molière's *Don Juan*, Alfred de Musset's “dramatic proverb” *No Trifling with Love*, as well as the dramatizations of the Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, *The Last day of a Condemned Man* by Jean-Hippolyte Tisserant, Eugène Labiche's *The Piggy Bank*, George Feydeau's *Pig in a Poke*, Sartre's *The Trojan Women*, and Remo Forlani's *War and Peace in the Café Sneffle*. This is ample proof of his “love for the theater” about which, judging from notes made in 1978 (see *Skladište*), Kiš intended to write an essay.

Kiš himself speaks, in his explanatory text “On *Electra*,” of the specific occasion for the writing of that play, including his dramaturgical approaches and his answers to linguistic-stylistic challenges. That text was written to appear in the program for the theater performance and is included in this volume. There's nothing we need to add to it, either. Let us simply say that the reach and range of his “free association on a dramatic text,” as he himself characterized his work, can be judged by comparing them to Euripides' original. One will see then that on the basic design of Euripides' tragedy an independent poetic creation has come into existence.

⁸ BITEF is the *Beogradski internacionalni teatarski festival*, or the Belgrade International Theater Festival. It was established in 1967 and remains a respected forum to this day.

It starts with the logic of the translation into another language but it also displays dramatic tension arising from its powerful lexical, syntactical, and rhythmic development; furthermore, it is also a tragedy with a different psychological and ethical charge. The changes undertaken in this version are more radical, and the poetic reach and spectrum of associations are incomparably superior to those in Sartre's play *The Trojan Women*, which is based on a different (and again eponymous) play by Euripides.

DOCUMENT 5: "(Notes on) Two Screenplays"

by Mirjana Miočinović

SOURCE: Appeared on the cover flaps of *Dva filmska scenarija*

Many professional writers of Danilo Kiš's generation, among them Borislav Pekić and Mirko Kovač, were engaged in the writing of screenplays. Kiš himself only tried his hand twice at this kind of work; in a short period of time during the year 1979 he wrote both a lengthy treatment or synopsis for a film he planned about the life of Marin Držić and a full-fledged screenplay, called *Končarevci*, that was supposed to be directed by Veljko Bulajić. Before this, he had briefly collaborated (in the summer of 1976) with the director Dušan Vuković on the screenplay for his feature film *Akcija Stadion*.⁹ One of the texts from Kiš's estate, an essay with the title "Preludij za ludnicu,"¹⁰ discusses this project. (See the posthumous volume *Skladište*.) The film was shot in 1977. Only the names of Slavko Goldštajn and Dušan Vukotić are listed as authors of the screenplay.

Typewritten versions of the two above-named screenplays are preserved among Kiš's manuscripts. One of them is entitled *Marin Držić Vidra* and the other *Končarevci* (with the subtitle "Factory Story"). Adria Film of Zagreb, which ordered the treatment on the life of Marin Držić, never started production on their film. The

⁹ *Operation Stadium* in English. The film is available in its entirety on YouTube. It is a film about the Ustaša regime in Zagreb during World War II.

¹⁰ "Prelude to a Madhouse" in English. The essay is not yet translated.

fate of Kiš's other screenplay was quite a bit more dramatic and, to this day, obscure. A tentative agreement must have been worked out with Jadran Film through the author's publishing agency of Serbia; a photocopy of Kiš's proxy (dated July 2, 1979) attests to this fact. The proxy form also shows that the screenplay was written in Dubrovnik between March 27 and April 17 of that year and that its completion accomplishes "the stipulated writing task". In Kiš's business records, which were painstakingly maintained, there is no material proof of any kind that would confirm any further collaboration with the organization that ordered the work or with the director. A film by Veljko Bulajić, entitled *Visoki napon*,¹¹ based on the same theme as Kiš's screenplay, was completed in 1981. The credit for the screenplay goes to three people: Mirko Bošnjak, Veljko Bulajić, and Ivan Salečić. The reasons for the abandonment of Kiš's screenplay have not been clarified, and one can only infer that they have to do with the author's approach to the topic.

The treatment for *Marin Držić Vidra* draws on several vital scholarly works about Držić (1508–1567). The bibliography that Kiš appended to the work testifies to this fact. Držić's life is presented chronologically, starting with his youth and going all the way to his death and including the locations in which the various events unfolded (Dubrovnik, Siena, Venice). The picturesque descriptions so characteristic of Kiš predominate over dialogue, which it would be necessary to elaborate upon only in a screenplay. The figure of Držić as the perpetual rebel, and as the "Renaissance man" *par excellence*, emerges from his portrayal in this sketch in all of its grandeur and tragedy; Držić cannot be separated from his art or divorced from life by either the calling of a man of the cloth or the mercantile (in spite of everything) environment in which he is born and raised.

The writing of the screenplay for *Končarevci* represented for Kiš a complete departure from the literary world he had known up to that time, a world he typically construed as "sunk".¹² This condi-

¹¹ *High Tension* in English.

¹² The word used here is *potonulo*, which in Serbo-Croatian denotes "sunk" or "sunken" with the possible added connotation of "drowned" or "lost". The same word also comes up in the original of the Indian proverb used at the start of the play *Night and Fog*.

tion of “sunkennes” typically involved distance not only in time but also in space from that which is labeled “our contemporary reality.” This screenplay, however, reveals precisely this: an astonishing familiarity with “our reality”. This exploration encompasses two decades (from the first years of the postwar period to the end of the 1960s) and is depicted through the lives of a group of people that literature has marginalized—the working class. The screenplay is historically attested only insofar as it is connected to the facts that the “Rade Končar” factory was constructed right after the war and that its evolution was refracted in part through the turbulent and tragic course of events from the period of the Cominform crisis with the Soviet Union.

The grim face of industrialization, which plucked people from their natural surroundings, and touching moments of enthusiasm and hope, where the personal (and usually the personally tragic) blend with the “optimism” of ideology, combine to create scenes that speak alternately to the fragility and toughness of the material that comprises *homo sapiens*. The screenplay does not track the events in chronological order. Instead it uses short sequences to counterpose, contrapuntally, the “before” of the mid-1940s and the “now” of the 1960s. This nonsequential succession anticipates, much more convincingly than an ordinary arrangement, the “work of the hand of time” by demolishing its linear monotony.

These two screenplays have not been published until now.

